2021 Scholarship Essay Contest

Update (May 23): We have a winner!

Above: Lochlyn Ramsey accepts the $2,500 check from Chairwoman Karen Prelipp.

Lochlyn Ramsey is the winner of the Huron County Democratic Party's scholarship essay contest. A graduating senior from Norwalk High, Lochlyn is planning to attend Ohio Northern University in the fall. His $2500 scholarship award will be sent to Ohio Northern to apply towards tuition expenses. He plans to study computer science with a major in robotics. He recently participated in a world championship robotics contest with the Norwalk High robotics team, held virtually. Lochlyn also responded to a NASA invitation to young scientists to submit their names to be engraved on an arm of the Mars helicopter, "Ingenuity". So, he has his name on Mars now. Lochlyn is a boy scout and is completing his Eagle Scout program by assisting the North Fairfield History Museum with window box construction. He is also the first chair on the alto sax for the Norwalk High wind ensemble. Asked why he entered the scholarship contest, he said "I enjoy history and government. It's a toss up between technical/science studies, and the other. The essay was a technical question that I thought I could write about."

Although there is no scholarship money attached, we want to recognize Spenser Colish-Patrick, who came in second, also from Norwalk High. The third-place winner is Isabella Herrig, from St. Paul High. The contest was very close, with only a two-point spread between the first and third place winners. A special kudos to Spenser who has worked the election polls for several years already.

This year's essay topic was "Is it better to elect the US President through the electoral college system or directly by a majority vote of the population?" Several questions were offered as help. The contest was judged blind by a panel of three educators, who did not know the name, gender or school of the essayists they were judging. The content was defined by the topic and judged on a point scale based on content, style and ,mechanics (grammar, spelling, etc.). The judges noted the "thoughtful approach to the topic", and appreciated that the students "tied the topic to current events".

The Huron County Democratic Party established this scholarship essay contest to encourage broader thinking and participation in our democratic process among young people, learning how government functions, vetting candidates, and voting in local, state and federal elections. Ramsey's essay, included here, is a fine example of the awareness among some of our young people of current political events:

There are many touchstones of American culture. Apple pie, football, and rock and roll are all seen as uniquely American, some of our finest contributions to global culture. However, there is one American institution that we hold chief among all others, so deeply rooted in our culture that it served as the basis for the creation of our country. America's favorite pastime isn't baseball, but instead democracy. The ability to choose for ourselves and mold the country into our own ideals is one of our greatest freedoms, and the framers knew that to hold this union of states together, they needed to implement a system that would allow the people's will to guide the country. Their solution was the electoral college, a system that has persisted since the ratification of the constitution. However, The United States of today is very different from that of 1789, and the efficacy of this 200 year-old system has been called into question. To understand the debate between the popular and electoral systems, we must first take a look at the history of American democracy, and determine the reasoning behind the decisions the Founding Fathers made.

The Electoral College was established in Article II, Section 1 of the U.S. constitution. The section states, "The executive Power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America. [...] [He shall] be elected, as follows. Each State shall appoint, [...] a Number of Electors, equal to the whole Number of Senators and Representatives to which the State may be entitled in the Congress". To the Constitutional Convention, this seemed like the perfect election system. The people would have a say in their government, preventing the representation problems they had with the English parliament. Having an executive power, and a strong central government fixed the problems caused by the weakness of the Articles of Confederation. However, by not electing the President through popular vote, by giving the states the power to choose the electors, the framers were able to hold the fragile new union of independent states together. The electoral system was to the Executive what the Connecticut Compromise was to the Legislative. It balanced the governing power between the large and small states. In a popular system, and in the Virginia plan, states with small populations such as Delaware and Rhode Island would always be outvoted. An equal representation system, such as the New Jersey Plan, wouldn't have been an accurate representation of the people's will. Matching the number of electors to the number of Representatives and Senators allowed the system to strike a balance between pure popular and equal representative democracy, holding the new country together.

It's been over two centuries since pen was put to parchment to form this country, and many things have changed. We are no longer a fledgling nation, finding its footing after fighting for its independence. We are no longer a loose collection of quarrelling states. Since the Civil War, our union has only grown stronger with each hardship we've endured. People today tend to care more about broader national political conflicts than conflicts between states. With the shifts in our national identity should come shifts to our governance and election system, and there have been. Of our twenty-seven constitutional amendments, seven of them have revised our election system, granting voting rights and fixing issues with Article II. However, the fundamental system, the electoral college, has remained unchanged since the 12th amendment was ratified in 1804. Our greatest intra-national conflict, the turning point, when our loose federation became a union, was still sixty years away.

The electoral system we have today is still the same system that was being used when states would regularly threaten to secede. It is no longer relevant to modern America. In order to progress as a nation, we need to vote as a nation. Relying on the state electors to vote the will of the people does not always give an accurate representation of the popular vote. Over our nation's history, there have been 165 instances of "faithless electors" and four elections where the winner of the popular vote lost due to the electoral college. If the electoral college cannot accurately represent the people, then the system should be re-evaluated and re-created to continue to provide for the truly American institution of democracy in the 21st century and beyond.