

Emerging Scholars Conference – Speech

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Do you remember your school bully? Did they call you or your classmates names, mock your appearance? Did they spread rumors about you among peers—or even teachers?

Perhaps they targeted you online, sharing cruel memes or posts to embarrass you?

Maybe they were physically abusive?

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- Over the last few years, we have seen Congress spending millions of taxpayer dollars to settle sexual misconduct and discrimination claims (Vavra).
- We saw Kevin McCarthy, in an unprecedented moment, ousted as Speaker of the House for attempting bipartisan cooperation (Freking et al.).
- We saw Matt Gaetz allegedly trying to pressure McCarthy to halt an Ethics Committee investigation into himself (Marquez). The Committee later found **SUBSTANTIAL** evidence of Gaetz violating House Rules, including allegations of prostitution, the rape of an underage girl, obstruction of Congress, and illicit drug use, all during his service as a congressman (Amiri et al.).

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– Gaetz Bae, anyone?

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– Our Tax Dollars at Work!

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- We saw a union leader threatening to fight a representative,

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who happened to be an undefeated MMA fighter (Popli).

– Good Luck with That!

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- A representative from Colorado was seen groping and being groped in a public, family setting (Fortinsky).

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- We read a Texas representative's post mocking the wheelchair-bound governor of Texas, calling him,

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“Governor Hot Wheels” (Daniels).

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This is a tiny list of only what has been reported. With a couple of exceptions, the representatives' attitudes have been to double-down on their bad behavior rather than owning up to it. These behaviors are becoming more and more accepted in popular culture. Yet, studies show most of the population is sick of it (Nadeem).

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So, why do we continue to allow it, or even vote them back into office?

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Phasing out political parties in the United States, inspired by systems like Utah's nonpartisan municipal elections and Nebraska's unicameral legislature, can reduce political polarization, enhance proportional representation, and encourage greater civic engagement. By revisiting the prophetic warnings of America's Founding Fathers

against the **dangers of partisanship**, and utilizing the mechanisms built into our constitution, **We the People** can create a pathway to more effective governance, a revitalized democratic system, and a return to the visionary and revolutionary words in the preamble of our constitution. Namely, forming a more perfect union.

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Now that you've heard my proposal, and the why of it, I invite you all to consider the following questions while we explore this topic further:

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- Do these actions reflect the maturity of adults, or are they just playground antics dressed in suits and ties?

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- Have the schoolyard bullies simply traded control over the swings and slides for power and influence?

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- Are the Democratic and Republican parties nothing more than the 'mean girls' of Capitol Hill, cliques vying for dominance?

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- Have the political elites turned the halls of Congress into a glorified high school, complete with gossip, exclusion, and petty rivalries?

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- Are these individuals who experienced bullying in their youth and later turned the tables as they matured? Or could it be a mix of all those scenarios?

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- What lessons are younger generations learning from this conduct?

Before humans accepted the social contract that Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau wrote of, we existed in what is termed the state of nature.

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In this state, there were no formal rules. Survival required brute strength and constantly being on edge.

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A key part of survival in the state of nature was forming in-groups; communities of like-minded people. These groups offered a level of security.

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However, the advent of the social contract marked a profound shift. The promise was simple: surrender the ability to harm others in exchange for security, stability, and the opportunity to dedicate energies to innovation, cooperation, and the betterment of civilization. This allowed governments to intervene and regulate specific behaviors, creating a climate where society can prosper.

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And it worked. From transportation networks

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to educational systems

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to healthcare infrastructures, much of what we take for granted today emerged because of the societal stability afforded by the social contract.

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Now, how does any of this relate to political parties,

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and why should you care?

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Well, it affects all of us whether you pay attention to politics or not. And, as humans progressed, those in-groups didn't disappear. Instead, they evolved within the framework of the social contract, transforming into ideological affiliations and political factions—another word for parties.

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The labels we assign—Democratic, Republican, even the Independent Party—are modern echoes of the tribal associations and cliques of old. These factions offer individuals the ability to identify with a group that shares their values, beliefs, and goals—on the surface. But, as we've seen lately, this can be shallow, as evidenced by mass exoduses from parties to Unaffiliated.

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They also perpetuate a divisiveness that feels eerily like the dynamics of the state of nature:

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the us versus them paradigm,

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the Alpha Betas versus

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the Nerds,

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the Mean Girls versus

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the Outcasts.

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Political parties are a double-edged sword. At one time, they were essential for organizing collective action in complex societies, but not anymore. Now, their continuance risks reinforcing divisions and undermining the very unity that the social contract seeks to achieve, paving the way for our devolution into anarchy...

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...which Hobbes viewed as: a “...war of all against all.”

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There are many possible first steps we could take to change the incentive structures for power in the United States, like getting rid of corporate lobbying and finding a way to reverse Citizens United v. FEC, which allowed corporations levels of influence that are

only afforded by the ultra-wealthy, who only make up a little more than 1% of the population.

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We could remove the ability to utilize psychographic models of citizens in marketing and politics, which can know you as well as a spouse would know you,

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and that was before AI.

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This is certainly not an exhaustive list. And while I do think those changes would be substantial, I think the removal of political parties from politics is one of the more important potentials to look at right now.

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There are studies that have shown that making voting nonpartisan increases civic engagement and gets people to research the merits of their candidates at a higher rate than with parties (Kirkland).

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And there are studies that show that diverse groups of problem solvers outperform groups of high abilities (Hong et al.). This could lead to better quality candidates to vote for, and would remove polarization as a default, instead offering an increase in debates on the issues that matter.

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I believe this is the nudge that society needs right now!

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Thank you.

Are there any questions?

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