

## **Guest Blogger – Inica Kotasthane – Watchung Hills Regional High School**



### **Looking Back and Looking Ahead: Reflecting on a Four-Year-Old Essay That Is As Important As Ever**

Four years ago, as a fourteen-year-old high school freshman, I wrote an essay for and won the 2018 Y Vote Essay and Video Contest sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Greater New Brunswick. Reading the essay now, I cringe at my less-sophisticated word choice and cliché quotes, but I am astounded at how relevant the message has remained: young people need to vote in order to create the future that they want to see for themselves and the generations that come after them.

I turned eighteen a couple of months ago, and I had already registered to vote the year before. For many people, registering to vote is their first realization that they are part of the political process, but I didn't have such a revelation because I feel like I've been part of this process for years; I've worked with the League of Women Voters, with Next Generation Politics, with the New Jersey High School Democrats, Generation Ratify, and with the office of a state senator over the past four years. I've helped my peers educate themselves on candidates' stances on issues, finding their closest poll locations, and understanding how the electoral college works. And I feel that young people having this kind of knowledge and experience about the way their government functions is necessary, but not happening at the rates that it should.

Registering to vote is not the only, or the most effective, way to get involved in government as a young person—that is one thing that I disagree with my past self about. Before I was even eligible to vote, I was calling my representatives and urging them to vote on legislation or organizing letter-writing campaigns. There are plenty of ways for young people to get civically engaged, whether that means they get involved in local campaigns or simply educate themselves on current events, before they ever cast a ballot. In fact, I believe that having this kind of government exposure is necessary in order to help create a new, educated generation of voters that don't simply vote based on party, but on policy.

Since the writing of my essay in 2018, one of the topics that I've explored the most throughout my time in various organizations and with various government officials is civics education. In order to uphold the essence of democracy, both current and future voters must have sufficient knowledge over how the political process works, the stances that parties have historically and contemporarily taken on certain issues, and how current events reflect certain flaws or strengths in the U.S. government. These three prongs are necessary for a fulfilling understanding of what exactly is at stake when a vote is cast—it's not enough to know who the candidates are, voters must also have an idea of why they are running and what problems they plan on solving. And surprise, surprise, the easiest way to disseminate civics education is by implementing it in schools and teaching young people.

Young people ages 18-24 aren't just a formidable political force (judging by poll numbers) nor just another demographic for candidates to "target." They are also the population that has the most potential to bring positive change to our democratic process through voter mobilization and civics education. Young people are an untapped resource in government, but I have full faith that my peers, and all of the students that are participating in this year's Y Vote Essay and Video Contest, are up for the task.

**Information about this year's contest may be found at [lwvgnba.com](http://lwvgnba.com).**