

I am going to talk to you about government and how you can be involved in it. And yes, your input actually makes a great difference in the way things are done at a local, state, and finally national level. I first got interested in government when I attended a TeenPact class last year. Founded in 1994, TeenPact's motto is "Changing lives to change the world." At this week long educational class, they inform students all about government from how it takes to win an election to how a bill is passed and everything in between. They believe that this younger generation should be informed about government and that they can make a difference. I believe people are a major part of government and often don't know enough about it to help out. Today I want to tell you about how elections work, how you can lobby for things you believe in and make a difference, and finally how you can help others in your community become aware about how they can make a difference too.

First I would like to explain how the election process works. This being election year, everyone is paying attention to the news and the way things are shaping up and turning out. Did you know though that you have a great deal to play in this? Now before you start telling me that your vote doesn't matter, let me point this small fact out to you. If everyone felt that their vote didn't count, no one would vote. Then were would we be? Primary election is where delegates are appointed to certain political parties. People decide which party they want to run for and where they stand on today's top problems and issues. General election is where everyone running from all the parties gather and they hold a general election open to everyone that is of voting age. People have the potential to change the world, at least their part, when they take the time to vote. Runoff elections happen when there is a tie in the general elections. This is normally done by the Secretary of State in most states. In Wyoming, it would be Max Maxfield. You can do more than just vote for your candidate. In the early stages you can help with a grassroots campaign. Anyone can help with a grassroots campaign. Candidates love when children and teenagers volunteer their time to go door to door knocking, help during a campaign speech, or display signs. Finally, be an informed voter. Do you ever look at your ballot and wonder who this person even is? Watch the person's life and see if it matches up with what they are saying. Make sure you know the candidate you want to vote for before you cast your ballot.

The second thing I would love to tell you about is lobbying. There were almost three hundred bills brought to the legislation committee in the 2012 budget session this year. General sessions are held up to 40 days during the odd years while budget sessions are during the even years and not held for more than twenty days. Although a representative or senator may be sponsoring a bill, most of the legislators don't know a lot about each specific bill. This is where you get to step in and help the government, again! Anyone is allowed to lobby and as long as you are not representing a corporation, you don't even need to register with the secretary of state. As a resident of Wyoming who really cares about what is happening, it is great if you can go and talk while legislation is in session. There is no way for your legislators to know every little detail about all the bills that pass through committee. They expect people to come in and explain to them the good or bad points of a bill. Anyone can access the upcoming bills for the year by getting onto the Wyoming legislation website. Read the bills if you

get a chance and be informed about the laws they are passing. Some laws may not apply to you, but there is a good chance most of them will affect you at some point and time. Always remember when you are at the capital to be respectful to everyone. You may not like a certain person, you may not even care for the way they think and act, but you should be polite to them. There may come a day when you need their help.

The last way you can get involved in government is to tell everyone else how they can help. Attending meetings, reading and watching the news, being informed about things taking place every day in your life, these are all good ways to get involved. The most important thing when you get into politics, whether you personally are running for an office, or if you are helping someone else, be respectful and polite. Do not try to disrepute the opponent just because he stands for something you don't believe in. Take responsibility for your actions and yourself and do not let the other people get to you.

I hope that I have given you something to think about today and that you can truly apply it to your life. Whether you are into government, politics, and the world around you, or you really aren't all that interested, everyone should be informed and stay informed. With the right information and knowing how you can help your country, there is always something everyone can do. Remember, elections aren't just for the people running, they are for you as well. Stay informed and vote. Voting is a privilege that over half the population of the United States were not able to do until 1869. Women were first allowed to vote in the Wyoming territory. Everyone should take advantage of the fact we are allowed to vote and have a say in who runs our country at national, state, and local level. Lobbying allows us the opportunity to voice our opinions and concerns to legislators that would otherwise have no idea about some of the bills that pass through every year. Getting involved with local elections helps you get the right person into office that thinks like you do and wants what you want. Helping others understand that there is a lot they can do as a citizen is an important part of having the government we do in the United States. Really give some thought as elections approach to who you want representing you!

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