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Cerny: Hold government officials accountable at the polls

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Posted: Thursday, October 17, 2013 12:00 am

By Tasha Cerny

When I was a sophomore in high school, I met a Holocaust survivor living in my home town. She came to visit my honors English class, right after we had finished reading the novel



“Night,” by Elie Wiesel.- Listening to her speak about her experiences was simultaneously heartbreaking and fascinating.- As she sat there, recounting the horrors of her past, she gave the entire class a stern look and said something along the lines of: “Be careful who you pick as your leaders, because all it takes is one crook and the whole thing will crumble.” I will never forget that.

At the time, my classmates and I thought that idea was a bit too paranoid-after all, isn't America based on a foundation of freedoms that inherently opposes tyranny? Had we not been learning about the government system of checks-and-balances set up to prevent a power overthrow since grade school?- The idea seemed simply impossible.

Yet the older I get, the more I realize what she meant. As the government shutdown has clearly demonstrated, we need to pay attention to the leaders we elect. We are ill informed-more concerned with Hollywood scandal than public policy, more likely to base our political opinions on biased sources rather than facts. With the growing division between the Republican and Democratic parties, it's becoming more and more important that people of our generation educate themselves on the issues and really start considering our future as a country.

Being an uneducated voter is dangerous. When you don't know the candidates you are voting for, it's easy to vote solely off party bias, or simply choose the names that look the most familiar, and this often means that the best candidates for the job aren't being chosen.- Sometimes - especially in an eternally-red state like Kansas - two candidates from the same party might run, but one will switch party association so that both parties are represented.- And voting by name recognition only means that you are probably choosing the candidate who had greatest campaign funds, not necessarily the candidate whose platforms you most agree with.- And to top it off, sometimes these politicians are not even true natives to the state that they end up representing.

It's frustrating to think about the government shutdown and how powerless we are in preventing or fixing it.- How can we hold our politicians accountable when they are the ones who design and pass our bills and regulations? Their ability to exclude themselves from the consequences of their own legislation is, in itself, a form of corruption.-- I honestly think that if Thomas Jefferson were alive today, he would tell us (after having a



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massive stroke of shock upon seeing what our country has become) that “this is what your right to bear arms is for, people!”

But that may be an exaggeration.- The truth is, this isn't the first time the government has shut down, and though it feels a whole lot like Congress is unable to fulfill the most basic of their duties, it would still be a bit ridiculous to resort to violence.- However, though we don't have the power to simply upend congress at the moment, midterm elections will be upon us sooner than you think (about one year from now), and it is our duty as citizens to use this upcoming election as a way to hold Congress (and all of our political leaders) accountable.

So go online and do some research on your representatives, and find out whether you are happy with the job they are doing or not. And when midterm elections come around, don't forget to vote!

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