



Can We TALK?

In a divided nation, the inauguration of a new president is met by hope and anxiety, expectation and disappointment, in equal measure. The speech that the new president delivers after being sworn in sometimes soars into history, but more often sinks into oblivion before year's end.

Today's high school students have had a political coming of age shaped by the man who will take the oath of office Monday on the National Mall, Donald J. Trump. What are they hoping to hear from President Trump on Monday when he strides to the lectern to deliver his second inaugural address? What words, what messages would best reassure them, inspire them, boost their faith in their future as Americans?

The *Can We Talk?* initiative of the Committee of Seventy decided to ask high school students from across Pennsylvania just that question. Students were invited to submit short essays where they acted either as speechwriters for the new president or as aides suggesting ideas, themes or positions for him to include in his address.

We received 34 essays from seven Pennsylvania high schools and from one, somehow, in Ohio.

Reading these young Americans' words is at once a sobering and inspiring experience. The students are clear-eyed about their country's flaws and problems, but they show an encouraging idealism, a passion for the *idea* of America and a faith that their country can - and perhaps will - do better. Some are thrilled that Mr. Trump is their president again; some, upset. Several write with sophistication, and a touch of anger, about problems their elders may leave it to their generation to solve: inflation, extremism, climate change, addiction to screens, violence in the Middle East.

All the essays are presented here for you to read, but we recommend your attention particularly to the ones our panel of three judges - Justin Villere, Harris Sokoloff and Chris Satullo, the leaders of *Can We Talk?* - chose for special recognition. Essays were scored on three criteria: 1) strength and originality of ideas 2) clarity of expression 3) syntax and grammar.

The first prize of \$200 went to **Miriam Feday**, a senior at Whitehall-Coplay High School near Allentown. (Yes, Eagles' fans, that's Saquon Barkley's alma mater.) Her classmate, **Synthia Layous**, earned one of

the two second place awards of \$100. The other went to **Matt Torres**, a senior at Wissahickon High School in Ambler, Montgomery County.

So many of the essays were worthy that we decided to pick 12 students for honorable mention, with a \$25 award. Honestly, a number of the other essays barely missed the cut and are well worth your time.

We invite you to review them all.

Founded in 2017, the Can We Talk? program teaches high school and college students the core principles of civil dialogue and gives them experiences of productive conversation in a "brave space" where candor is encouraged and disagreement embraced.

FIRST PRIZE: MIRIAM FEDAY, SENIOR, WHITEHALL-COPLAY HIGH SCHOOL

Extremism and violence undermine everything this country stands for, and we cannot let them take control.

Over the past few years, we've witnessed the damage division can cause. We've seen communities torn apart by senseless violence, families torn apart by ideological divides, and hardworking Americans left behind by systems designed to uplift everyone.

These are not isolated incidents; they are a reflection of our shared values growing further and further apart. As a nation, we have the power to choose a different path, one where unity is prioritized, and our freedoms are protected. Throughout history, our democracy has thrived most when we stood together and not when we allowed the loudest voice in the crowd to drown everyone else out.

From the Civil War to this Gilded Age, extremism has cost us. Today we have the choice to either allow hatred and fear to dictate our future, or to build a nation that reflects the best of who we truly are. This path forward will not be easy, but it is necessary. Unity does not require uniformity, it demands compromise. It calls us to listen to who we disagree with and to find common ground when it feels impossible.

We must reject the voices that build division and amplify those who believe in something greater than themselves.

SECOND PRIZE: MATT TORRES, SENIOR, WISSAHICKON HIGH SCHOOL

By the time January 20th rolls around, President Trump should have to face a painful reality that has corroded the foundation of American democracy: for far too long, the powerful have lined up our system against ordinary citizens. It is now time for us to understand just how money and privilege have warped our government.

As Lincoln reminded us in his Gettysburg Address, ours is a government “of the people, by the people, for the people” —not for the elite few. This is not a concept but an imperative. Reform is needed to hold the mighty accountable and amplify the voices of the unheard. The president must translate his words into concrete measures to heal our divided nation. Real reform entails an abolition of the deeply set injustices that enable money and influence to quiet the majority.

Leadership should give way to listening to those on the margins instead of holding onto the status quo. What this country cannot afford any longer is a government that protects the privileged few at the expense of those it has sworn to serve. It is a moment for the restoration of our democratic values: a government in which all citizens have an equal voice and an equal chance to improve their lives, regardless of their social background.

President Trump must show that his administration is committed to making America great—a government of the people, by the people, and for the people—and one that truly reflects the enduring principles of equality and justice.

SYNTHIA LAYOUS, SENIOR, WHITEHALL-COPLAY HIGH SCHOOL

My fellow Americans, today we stand at an inflection point in our nation’s history. The problems we confront—division, uncertainty, and global instability—demand not just strong leadership but a new commitment to our common values.

In these turbulent times, we must remember that our strength has always come from our unity. Our differences in opinion, background, and belief make America beautiful. Time and time again, we have proven what we can achieve when we stand together. In the aftermath of September 11th, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, and recently as we battled the COVID-19 pandemic our nation came together to support one another with compassion, resilience, and a shared purpose.

But we must ask ourselves: why should it take tragedy to bring us together? Let’s carry that same spirit of unity into our everyday lives. Let’s face the challenges of inequality, climate change, and economic recovery with the same resolve we show in times of crisis.

I pledge to listen, to lead with integrity, and to fight for the needs of every American, not just those who support me. Together, we must rebuild trust in our institutions, revitalize our economy, and bridge social gaps that divide our fabric. Let us concentrate on that which brings us together: the hope of a better life for our children, the pursuit of liberty, and opportunity for all.

Today I ask you to join me in beginning this new chapter. One in which the American spirit is lifted by the brightness of a new dawn.

HONORABLE MENTION

Marian Dang, Senior, Cheltenham High School

As Donald Trump prepares to take oath of office, the message I need to hear is a message of assurance. American citizens, more than ever, need assurance. Their safety, prospect of the future, and hope has been threatened on all sides. On January 20th, people from around the nation, old and young, encouraged and defeated, silent and outspoken, will be sitting in front of their screens listening, anticipating. America was built on the pillars of not simply the word “democracy”, but of the mythos of hope.

Citizens have chosen America as their homes in search of this hope, this idea. My family of immigrants certainly did. The message that I want brought to America on January 20th is a message addressing the fear, the violence, and the uncertainty.

I want President Trump to not only recognize the commotion, but to provide a vision on how to heal, mend, and restore. How can Americans unite in their quest for hope when we cannot even unite? I need to hear that our President believes in the system that places him there. I need to hear that this system works to embrace me, and all those who call themselves American. The America I see is not the America that is me. On January 20th, I will be sitting in front of my screen, listening, anticipating.

I want hope. I want the hope that my family grasped just for me to have a shot, to belong. I want the assurance that I am American.

Austin Fares, Senior, Whitehall-Coplay High School

My fellow Americans, I know these last few years have been hard for our country. We don't understand each other, and it makes us feel like we're living in two different Americas. I wanted to address this today. When I travel across our country, I see things that are very different from what I read in the news or watch on television. I see neighbors helping neighbors after storms. I see people coming together to support small businesses. I see food bank volunteers working together without ever bringing up politics. This is the true America that I know.

As your president, I want to prioritize what brings us together instead of what drives us apart. Everyone wants a better future for their children, safe neighborhoods, and good jobs. These are American goals, not Republican or Democratic ones. I will listen to all Americans, not just those who supported me, and I will work to find solutions that satisfy both parties. By working together, we can prove that our democracy is still successful and that everyone who is prepared to put in the work can still achieve the American dream.

Cameron Herring, Sophomore, Whitehall-Coplay High School

My fellow Americans, as we stand here together as the United States of America, I speak to you with a vision of hope, resilience, and unity

. As a nation we've been faced with countless challenges and difficulties, at each turn we have emerged stronger by living out our true principles of equality, justice, and opportunity for all. Our history reminds us that these difficulties were fought for by brave men and women. It is our responsibility to honor those who sacrificed their lives for the American cause, by continuing to build a nation built on respect for one another.

That is why today, as the president of the United States of America, I am more committed than ever to lead a prosperous nation where every citizen, no matter their religion, or background can prosper without the fear of discrimination or any form of injustice.

Let us never forget that what makes our nation so great is our common values of equality and standing up in times of insecurity that make our nation great. As a nation we should commit ourselves to build a future not marked by our differences, but by our common purpose of building a country wherein every voice is heard, every dream is valued, and every individual can live with honor and dignity.

Imre Huss, Junior, Mastery School of Hawken, Cleveland, OH

In times such as these, where many Americans struggle to buy a home, pay their bills, and even buy groceries—while a fortunate few live in opulence—it seems we have lost the thread of the American dream that binds together the fabric of our nation. It is easy to lose sight of this dream, but it is in our darkest hours that the shared belief in the potential of all Americans to succeed propels us forward.

Today, I ask every American to rise above partisan divisions and join in a common purpose: to confront our challenges, lift up those who are struggling, and ensure our nation is worthy of the ideals that have long defined it. Together, we can reignite the American dream, not just for some, but for all.

On January 20th, as he stands before the nation, President Trump has an opportunity to fulfill his campaign promise to “unite our country by bringing it to new and record levels of success.” We must move past partisan hatred and division, as it is only from a foundation of unity and prosperity that we can address the many pressing problems facing our nation. Now, more than ever, we must come together around a shared purpose to heal these divisions, as we have in times of strife.

Cindy Jiang, Senior, Whitehall-Coplay High School

Today, my fellow Americans, marks an important day in our country's history. Not only are we engaged in external conflicts, but we are also creating an imbalance in internal powers. Today, that changes.

Today is the day where not only shifts power to the Republicans occur but also shifts our nation's power to its people. Our country has focused on and protected other countries for far too long, at the cost of our people's advancement. We have seen our country slowly deteriorate, from both external and internal conflicts.

Today marks the day that changes. We will unite for the good of America and improve ourselves, overcoming this era's problems such as immigration, social security, and our military. We will unite and protect our beloved nation from other countries, preventing more harm from being done to our workforces and job opportunities. But most importantly, we will unite to make America the strongest nation economically, socially, and technologically.

I ask you all today, to set aside your differences and join together for the good of our republic. We can and will make America great again. Thank you.

James King, Junior, Cheltenham High School

As President Trump starts his second term, I would hope to hear him speak with emphasis on bringing the country together. He could say something like, "We are stronger when we work as one nation, united by our shared values of freedom, opportunity, and justice."

He could show attention to the diversity of our nation while reminding us of what we want to achieve would bring us closer as a country and inspire cooperation.

I also think it's important for him to make sure his leadership is objective and fair. A statement such as, "I will lead with integrity, putting the well-being of everyone first, not just the rich" would help rebuild trust in our government from average citizens. Many Americans feel disconnected from the government, and we need this kind of reassurance to move forward.

Last, I would like to hear a call for collective action. He could say, "Together, we will tackle the challenges ahead, from minimum wage and the economy to climate change. I cannot succeed in fixing these issues without the support and efforts of every citizen." These words inspire hope and would be effectively reminding us as US citizens of our shared responsibility to make the nation better for our future generations.

By emphasizing unity and cooperation, President Trump's message could set a positive tone for his presidency and for the nation as a whole. His words have the power to inspire us and spur us on towards a brighter, more united four years.

Lamitta Layous, Sophomore, Whitehall-Coplay High School

Today, as we mark a new chapter in America's story, I want to address not only our challenges at home but also the crises happening abroad.

Currently, the Syrian people are experiencing immense hardship after years of conflict. Millions of innocent people enduring unimaginable suffering. Bombings continue to devastate communities, many are being displaced, and families are struggling to survive. They don't have access to basic necessities like food, clean water, or medical care. Children, who should be dreaming of brighter futures, instead live in jails, face hunger, trauma, the loss of homes and family members.

America has always been a symbol of hope and liberty. We cannot turn away from those who need us most. Just as we stood firmly with Ukraine in the face of aggression and injustice, we must now stand with the people of Syria. We must work to provide humanitarian aid, support those being displaced, and push for a solution to this devastating situation. This is not a matter of politics. It is a moral imperative to stand for human dignity and justice.

People of America. We are at our strongest when we show compassion. TOGETHER we can rise to meet the challenges of this moment. TOGETHER we could help, at home and abroad. TOGETHER we can reaffirm America's role as a beacon of hope and freedom in this troubled world. God bless the people, god bless America, and god bless the world.

Dylan McKeown, Senior, The Baldwin School

On January 20, I would hope to hear President Trump speak to the nation with a sense of unity.

While the future may be uncertain at this time for many, what the American people need most in this moment is reassurance that our shared values of freedom, opportunity, and democracy will continue on during his term. I would like to hear him recognize the importance of coming together, despite opposing political views, to address the pressing issues that affect all Americans.

He should acknowledge that while he is the president that his love for America remains unwavering, and he remains committed to working for the betterment of all citizens, regardless of their political leanings.

I would like to hear him say that he would offer both an honest reflection of the past and a hopeful vision for the future. He should acknowledge the pain and frustration felt by many, recognizing the struggles families have faced over the past few years such as economic hardships, the ongoing health crisis, and the deepening divisions in our society.

By doing this, he would show that he understands the stakes and that leadership requires empathy and strength.

Max Nemiroff, Freshman, Harriton High School

Ladies and gentlemen, my fellow Americans. We are here at the beautiful United States Capitol to celebrate this monumental victory. I stand before you, humbled by your respect.

This day marks America's golden age.

We've faced trials, but we are triumphant. We will secure our borders, revitalize our economy, and restore American manufacturing. We'll cut regulations, rejuvenate the market, and bring back law and order. We'll back our police, ensuring safe streets. We'll rebuild and modernize our military, keeping the USA unmatched in power and prosperity. Finally, we'll reaffirm American values like free speech and debate.

I call on all Americans to aid in rebuilding our communities, teaching our children our great history and opportunities. To our friends abroad, we seek cooperation. To our adversaries, we will meet any threats with our strength.

In closing, thank you to my family, friends, allies, and my incredible team. But most of all, thank you, the American people, for your faith in this nation and our collective dream of a brighter future. God bless you, and God bless America.

Peter Raffoul, Senior, Whitehall-Coplay High School

My fellow Americans, today I stand before you humbled by the trust you have placed in me and mindful of the sacrifices that have built this great nation.

I want to honor the countless immigrant families whose hard work and resilience have strengthened America. I know the kids who take on the burden of translating for their parents so that the family can access legal and medical services and everything else they have to do in order to support themselves, get an education, and raise a family. That's the essence of this country. My administration is deeply committed to providing quality education opportunities, pathways for economic mobility, healthcare, and basic resources for everyone—regardless of background.

But I also know the deep divisions in our country. Today, I promise to be a president to all Americans, not just to those who voted for me. I flatly reject discrimination in all its forms and commit this administration to the struggle for the rights and dignity of every community, most of all to those who feel invisible and unheard.

Together, we will lift up the working family, the immigrant, and the struggling for a place to fit in. Together we would celebrate our diversity and work to make the contribution of each and every American. Now let us move forward in hope—believing that the promise of the American Dream shall not be reserved but will be pursued as one, we can live by it.

Maxwell Rosado, Senior, Cheltenham High School

As a Hispanic middle-class citizen, I'd want President Trump to address the importance of unity and respect for all communities. I hope to hear a message of healing and understanding, where he acknowledges the diverse cultures that make up our nation and commits to policies that lift everyone, not just a select few.

I'd want him to promise fair opportunities for middle-class families—like affordable education, better health-care access, and support for small businesses that are the backbone of communities like mine. He should say that their skin color and language will determine no one's future, or where they come from.

I'd also like to hear him stand against harmful stereotypes about Hispanic communities. He should recognize the hard work we contribute to this country and pledge to protect immigrant families instead of tearing them apart. It would mean the world to hear him say he values our contributions, not just in labor but in culture, innovation, and leadership.

What would best meet this moment is a clear promise of fairness, inclusion, and respect. Words of hope and unity can pave the way for actions that bring us closer together as a nation, no matter where we come from or what we believe in.

Braedyn Zappe, Senior, Whitehall-Coplay High School

Throughout history, one thing has been clear about the rise and fall of nations, no matter the form of government, their fall always has a connection to the people's mistrust or trust in their government.

The Romans fell due to a great deal of internal conflict and corruption, both things plagued with mistrust. Even today, many nations struggle in keeping the trust of their citizens, with conflict arising often between people and their governments. This is also evident in America's history; many times, the nation is either built up or brought down by the trust our people had in our government.

For example, the nation rebuilt itself following a great depression, simply through willpower, changing times, and the people's extreme trust in the effectiveness of the government. But at other times, the opposite is evidently true; the trust America's people had in the government fell drastically after the events of the Watergate scandal, holding a clear and lasting impact on how much we trust our government. It's evident even now, our government does not have the same kind of trust from its people as it has in the past.

The presidents of our future would be wise to use trust as a tool, to help better shape our nation's future, and to lead America into the best possible direction. As President, I will strive to bring back the trust our people once had in our government and push our great nation into a bright and better future.

THE BALDWIN SCHOOL

SANA GOYAL, SENIOR

Fellow citizens of America, we are gathered today to celebrate a nation. I wish I could stand here and rejoice in a nation united by one. I wish I could praise you for this undeniably vast victory. Instead, I must beseech you to open your eyes to the division that plagues our land of the free.

To continue forward we must realize that our national issues can be reduced to one side being right or wrong. Our conflicts, which are influenced by various factors like religious differences, border disputes, political dissonance, and more, require a non-binary framing in order to find resolution. We must come together at a time like this and welcome those who are different from ourselves and embrace empathy.

As your president, I vow to preserve, protect, and defend you. Every American deserves the equal opportunity to be heard in government, and as your Commander in Chief, I will govern with integrity and justice at the forefront.

Together, we will rebuild trust in each other and our institutions, working to reunite our country again in the name of democracy and peace. Let us commit ourselves fully to the goal of a bright tomorrow, as I have. Now is a time of renewal, when we shall all move forward together, and may we always remember that our nation's greatest strength lies in our people.

ANNIE CAHILL, SENIOR

I have returned as it has been foretold. In many ways I have never left. Never judge a man by his words when he has risen but by his actions when he is down. I have clawed my way through filth in true American fashion and will not back down again. My second ascent will bring forth an era of great improvement, nay-perfection.

Hark, I've evolved while the enemies were rotting,

Thought I fell off? Nay, I was growing and plotting.

Silent moves are made while the doubters are talking,

Now I'm back on the scene, and I'll never be stopping.

Now, kneel. A nation is only as strong as its weakest citizens. The lowest of you stand before me, cringing at my power and influence. I will lunge into this audience. You, my citizens, will carry me over the water to the Washington Monument but never let a single drop of water sully my garments. Together, we will tear down the monuments of old. We will then begin to rebuild it by hand, just as we will rebuild my new nation.

The Washington Monument is unworthy of shading me from the sun. I am not weak and need no protection from the elements. The elements need protection from us. Our glory has surpassed anything nature could have anticipated for us. I am one with the world in every way that I can be. God is protecting my nation and its children. Now come and let us begin the most decisive era in American history. Huzzah!

LAILA GOPALANI, JUNIOR

Greetings my dear citizens, I stand before you not as the president, but as a fellow citizen hoping to change America as we know it.

We have been plagued by political polarization: different generations and different parties virtually unable to agree and respect each other. Now that I am in office, I lead with the hope of reconnecting the American people; I dream that we put aside our differences and treat each other with respect.

As Americans, we need to focus on pressing issues such as: the health of our citizens, trusting science, and ensuring women have rights to make decisions about their own bodies. With the rise of social media, it is nearly impossible to avoid fake news and miseducation, but I strive to do away with these issues.

I hope that as a president, I lead by example and help this country spend less time staring at a screen. Not only do some waste hours each day on their phones, but screen time affects our schools and young citizens. Most importantly, I want all of you to reflect on this past year.

I urge you to acknowledge both your highs and lows and make a goal to treat every person you meet with respect and compassion. As Americans we pride ourselves on our unity and patriotism, so we need to rebuild this country to be a nation people are proud to be citizens of. Regardless of our race, gender, socioeconomic status, or political beliefs, we are Americans, and when we fight together, we can truly accomplish anything.

SOPHIA CHEN, JUNIOR

As a citizen, I would like to hear Trump address the current state of our country, especially with all of the civil unrest happening around us.

To be honest, I feel like the word that best meets this moment is disappointment. Although I hope he sends a message of unity and one that shows he truly cares about the American people, I find it hard to believe his

administration will reflect this sentiment. I am also curious as to how he will address the stark political divide within our country, especially given both the immense support and opposition he has faced.

I would like to see him address all sides even if some people don't agree with him or his policies. I also hope to hear about his plans and what his goals are during this next presidential term. Ultimately, I just want to hear honest words, so often Trump lies or exaggerates, and I think what Americans need right now is something genuine.

Many have lost their trust in the American government and this inaugural address is a chance to be a little bit more open and vulnerable about where the country is headed, even if it means upsetting people or creating more backlash.

CHELTENHAM

JUDAH BLITSTEIN, SENIOR

Before January 20, 2025, 2024 happened. International massacres, TikTok electioneering, and college campus craziness headlined the year in which Donald Trump won his second term in the Oval Office.

From the reports on raw milk to the dogs-and-cats fiasco, the citizens of the USA rode a roller coaster unlike any in the past.

As Trump is coming into office with a laundry list of tasks (with some of those being byproducts of his pre-presidential actions), the country which elected him is more divided than ever. While the vote was significantly more askew than any of the other elections Mr. Trump was involved prior, the people whom he and his opponent(s) represented could not have more polar ideals for America.

I believe that Trump's ultimate goal from the very millisecond he is dubbed the 47th POTUS should be to unify the country. While he is a Republican, it is the President's responsibility to represent every citizen, regardless of political party. If you hate or love him, it doesn't matter: he's our president and he must recognize his role is to better the lives of all Americans.

Unlike his past terms, Trump needs to disregard his thirst for power and consider how he can better the nation he's at the helm of. Through his inaugural address, he must mention the infrastructure, programs, and acts he will create to repair this country. We can all hope that he has more than "concepts of a plan" for these next four years.

MARINA JEAN, SENIOR

A message I would like to hear from Donald Trump in his Inaugural address would be how he plans on helping unemployment and what plans he actually has to try and help the inflation in this country.

I would like to hear him talk about supporting all of the people in this country. I'd like for Donald Trump's message to be related to all American's and about the support he will give everyone in the country. I even think he could take inspiration of what other presidents have said in their inaugural speeches.

For example, he could reference Thomas Jefferson's first Inaugural Address where he says, "We are united with one mind and heart". The words I think would best meet this moment would be we are one country and should be able to rely on each other. We are a country that is kind of divided and we should be reminded to be more supportive of each other. These are messages that I would like to hear from Donald Trump in his Inaugural Address on January 20.

NICHOLAS LAM, SENIOR

Deportation raises significant ethical concerns, particularly when individuals have deeply integrated into a new country. While nations have the right to enforce immigration laws and protect their borders, the human impact of deportation is destructive.

Many individuals facing deportation have established lives, formed families, and contributed positively to their communities. Deportation can lead to family separations, causing emotional trauma and financial strain. Children are especially vulnerable to these disruptions.

Furthermore, returning individuals to potentially dangerous or unstable home countries poses moral dilemmas. It questions the balance between law enforcement and human rights, especially when individuals face threats to their safety and well-being.

A fair approach to deportation should include due process and access to legal representation. It should consider the broader humanitarian impact and strive for policies that respect both the rule of law and human dignity. This delicate balance requires compassion and a commitment to ethical principles, ensuring that immigration policies are just and humane for all involved.

How would you, Mr. President Trump, address these ethical concerns and ensure that deportation policies are both fair and humane?

LILY WILDEN, SENIOR

On January twentieth, I would like to hear Donald Trump address the political division currently faced by the United States. While many elections in the past have raised tensions between political parties, the 2024 election has caused an extreme national division between those who support Donald Trump and those who do not, even more so than when he previously ran for office.

In order for us to move forward productively as a nation, it is crucial that our president aims to foster a harmonious political and social environment.

Additionally, an assurance of political tolerance from Trump and his supporters feels necessary in order to quell the worries of those who voted in opposition to him.

Upon his election, many Americans have shared the fear that once in office, Trump will go after his adversaries, threatening both their wellbeing and constitutional rights.

While it's a low bar, I feel that an acknowledgement of the fact that while not everyone in the nation supports the president-elect, it is his duty to serve all people of the United States, regardless of their class, race, gender, or political beliefs, would alleviate the worries of many US citizens. In short, whether or not I agree with Trump's policies or beliefs, I think it is vital for the president of the United States to embrace a stance of political toleration.

FRIENDS SELECT SCHOOL, PHILADELPHIA

BEN YERKES, JUNIOR

This is the message I think the nation needs and deserves to hear.

Humans have the luxury of speaking and communicating clearly with one another. This luxury becomes far more integral to our survival in times of conflict and division. The moment we cease to use words as solutions, we cease to view each other as human.

Once we forget to view each other as people, it becomes boundlessly easy to fill our minds with hatred for one another. Hatred opens the door to violence and conflict, without remorse or discretion. Differing ideologies exist, but they shouldn't fracture the respect and common courtesy we owe to each other as human beings. The moment we stop talking, it becomes harder and harder to start listening again.

Today, we are splintered into sharp and closed-off groups living, perhaps, as divided as our nation has ever been. In a world where war and death walk freely among our neighbors, we shouldn't embrace conflict and

hate. Instead, we need to use this amazing tool of speech and communication to connect and understand each other. We must remember that we are strongest together.

This isn't my America or your America, but our America. Not only is it our America, but this is the United States of America—the land of the free with unalienable rights, liberty, and justice for all. So, we should dampen our pointed anger and remember that the most vital instrument lies in all of us. Our voices make us free.

MERION MERCY ACADEMY (INNDWELLING PROGRAM)

SHELSIE LUCIANO, FRESHMAN

I would like the future president, Donald J. Trump, to speak on the economic predicament of the United States of America.

Let's use the price of eggs for example. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2020 the average price for a dozen eggs was \$2.25; as of 2024, the average price was \$3.65. When taking in these prices, someone might not be concerned or alarmed, but that is an increase of \$1.4 every four years. By this rate, the average price of eggs would be about \$5.70 by 2030.

Future president Trump needs to state that he will do everything he possibly can to ensure economic comfort and stability to the American citizens. When you see someone struggling to make ends meet, not having any time for loved ones because they are always working to just survive, these numbers are given flesh, blood, and real emotions.

For a person in a position of comfort, a dozen eggs for \$3.65 dollars might seem dismissive. Yet, to a family who can barely afford rent, can hardly pay tuition, who have to fight to live in the "land of the free," \$3.65 dollars means a harrowing choice. Economic freedom leads to other freedoms; a lack of economic security is a loss of liberty. This is why I would like the future president, Donald J. Trump, to speak on the dwindling economic state of this country.

MIRAKEL MOORE, FRESHMAN

The future of democracy in our country has been a highly contentious topic. In my opinion, Donald Trump would need to assure citizens of the United States of America that he will truly "make America great again."

But beyond that, he needs to be able to recognize and address his past failures as president, as well as his undeniably controversial persona. What does it say to other nations that our president for the next four years has been the only man in America's history impeached twice? It tells them that the U.S. is divided internally, meaning that the U.S. may have exploitable weaknesses that one may use to their benefit.

This humility, as seen by the legacy of the late Jimmy Carter, is inspirational to all Americans because we can recognize a common humanity in Trump's stubbornness and failures.

Trump needs to acknowledge that now he has the responsibility of not only representing his organization, but the United States of America as a whole. He needs to promise the citizens that they can feel safe in their homes. Every citizen needs to know that they are protected under the U.S. in spite of whether they're an immigrant, or naturally born in America.

Americans need to be able to trust their president, the person who's Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces and the Chief Diplomat of our country.

WHITEHALL-COPLAY

TIM LEYOS, SOPHOMORE

Today, we call on everyone to come together as one nation. In the past, we have experienced many challenges and divisions within the nation. However, we must remember that our shared love for this country is stronger than what divides us.

Creating jobs, improving roads and schools, and making energy more affordable and reliable are issues that matter to people's daily lives, and I will focus on improving these issues to better the lives of our people.

As President, I promise to protect our nation's interests and promise to work with other nations to keep peace, fairness, and safety. I will secure the border, support the military, and tackle any threats that come our way. Most importantly, I have a vision to make America great again. To leave people with hope, painting a vision where our nation is stronger, kinder, and more united. Therefore, I invite you to join in building that future in order to remind you that, together, we can accomplish great things.

LOGAN LEMAK, SOPHOMORE

Fellow Americans, today I come to you for the solemn purpose of exchanging office with the current resident. I wish every American in the United States could band together on this day for a peaceful exchange of office.

Citizens of America, I sympathize with the financial hardships that many of you face daily; and I come to you with a hope for a better future. Many families in the country struggle to survive due to the Inflation that runs rampant driving the cost of food, housing, and life-saving medication that the people of this Republic rely on.

The people of this nation want to be able to afford life, and my cabinet and I are working on a plan to bring back the economic stability we saw before the COVID-19 pandemic-it's going to be huge. Though I make

many promises, I understand that I must listen to the American people on this issue, so I come to you to ask what more I should do to ensure economic stability and make life affordable for Americans again.

HABIB LEYOS, SOPHOMORE

At a time of disunity in which boundaries—not physical, concrete boundaries but invisible boundaries – separate us along cultural, economic, ethnic, social, and political lines, we must unite ourselves: not as aliens, nor Republicans or Democrats but as Americans.

Despite our differences, we are more alike than different. Neither race, gender, ethnicity, political beliefs, religion, or economic and social classes can separate us from who we are: American. I am not here to divide but to unite. The people of the United States, not the mere interests of political leaders, come first.

I assure you I will uphold the Constitution. I assure you that I will support—not impede—the nation’s progress from its past challenges, including division within the United States, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and the COVID-19 pandemic. I assure you that this nation will be better than it was yesterday for all Americans. I assure you that I will foster, not hinder, education.

I assure you that all Americans will be able to afford basic human necessities like gas for transportation, healthcare, education, housing, and grocery goods. I assure you that your rights and your children’s rights will be protected. I assure you that we will have national security. I assure you that this great nation will become greater—not just for Republicans but also for all who reside in the United States.

I assure you, fellow citizens of the United States, we are American.

GIOVANNA MARZOUQ, SOPHOMORE

A man who can see only with his eyes and hear only with his ears, in reality he does not see or hear. Now is the time for more than just listening to big promises and sophisticated language. It’s time to let the succession make the noise.

Every American citizen, despite his religion, ethnicity, gender, education and social status is a part of the true solution to rebuild this country to make it, once again, the land of freedom and an icon of democracy. To achieve our goal, we need to work together to eradicate ignorance, poverty and unfair health care. These three dangerous phenomena can contribute to creating instability and tensions within society, causing a real threat to the sense of our unity.

By moving forward, releasing the overwhelming weight from peoples’ shoulders that accumulated through the palpable economic burden, providing them with better education, better health care plans, along with economic expansion will promote a civil society.

Comforted human beings are more able to fully comprehend the spectacles surrounding them, leading the way to bridge the inequality gap between people, ensuring national protection from any threat, and supplying unbiased valuable solutions to any subject matter that fits everyone's needs. One hand can't clap by itself.

Joining our forces is the root of a balanced, strong, and energetic nation that can face any challenges, where new generations can live safely. Together, we can stand up against any injustice while advocating the rights of all people.

DAYNA NELSON, SOPHOMORE

Fellow United States citizens: ahead of me lies a grand assignment.

Today, residents of different backgrounds, origins, and walks of life have assembled in hopes of assurance. Currently, our Country faces persistent calamity. With prices rising, resources depleting, and war fervently raging, inklings of adversity are evident across the Nation. It may be difficult for us to retain our hope.

Yet, despite division, our Country was built on a hope-inducing foundation. That foundation was crafted with principles of unity and purpose. May the motives of our past guide our present and affirm our future. We will undoubtedly face trials. Already, we face many. But may the bonds that unify us keep us secure and steadfast.

May our service and compassion for our fellow Americans overcome our grief and dissent. As for the trials we face, I promise to rise to not only aid our nation but also to *prosper* it.

We may not be able to change what we face. But we can affect how we respond to them. Henceforth, let us strengthen our fellow Americans. Let us hold on to the hope that we have. Let us persevere with ambition and unity. Let us unite as one nation for a better tomorrow and a brighter future.

ANNA PIMENTEL, SOPHOMORE

The election of 2024 has without a doubt been a divided one, and while there were many voters left happy with the election results, there were also many left unhappy, confused, angry, and everything in between.

Many voters have been skeptical of me, and whether they could trust me to carry out my promises as a president. I hope to gain the trust of my entire country sooner rather than later, and to assure that you all feel the trust American citizens should feel with their president, I will be clear with every policy I make, leaving no room for alternate interpretations or confusion.

I would also like to address the disunity that our country has faced recently. We are the united states, not the divided states, and therefore we should all help each other as members under one nation, no matter if we have the same viewpoints or different viewpoints regarding politics, religion, and other topics. I am a president for all of you, whether you voted for me or not, and I hope to make that clear during my second term in office.

JASON TUYEN, SOPHOMORE

As a citizen of the United States of America, I stand here today, in the nation's capital to convey a message of hope and unity among all Americans, today.

I believe that we, as Americans, need to hear a few words of encouragement and unity. The simple words, "We the people" will effectively convey this idea. We the people, date back to the Declaration of Independence where the foundation of our country started from, and is still building upon to make a stronger nation. As Americans, we are one.

"We the people" means every citizen in the United States, no matter what our differences are, such as political or religious affiliations. Everyone should put aside their differences and work together to tackle the challenges we face today and, in the future, carving a new path for opportunity and unity. If we the people stand together, there is nothing that we can't achieve.

By doing this, we will be able to create a nation in which every individual has the opportunity to prosper and grow to be their greatest self, showing the true democracy of America that we have fought for, the American dream.

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