

It's Your Fault

An America Story by Collin Gossel

Our American Government is not broken. It's not broken in the same way a rolling-pin isn't broken when you use it to anally pleasure yourself - that is to say, it's still functional...but not being used as it was intended.

Here's my game plan (because I'm a real up-front, straight-edge kinda guy): I'm about to lay out for you like a ba-jillion easy-to-understand examples of how our government is screwed up. Then, I'll theorize why it is that way, and how it's affecting good people like you and me. Then, I'll SURPRISE YOU AT EVERY TURN by telling you it's your fault (and mine).

Here is my thesis statement (as is required by all 4th grade English Teachers): **99% of problems with American Politics would be solved if the general American populace simply made an effort to know what was going on.** (Are you happy, Mrs. Rhea?!)

Before you decide whether or not you're included in my sweeping, wildly generalized condemnation, consider these questions: 1) Who the hell do you think you are? 2) Who are the **three** men/women who represent you in Congress? 3) What do they stand for beyond being Democrats or Republicans? 4) Who are the women/men who represent you in **State** Congress? 4) What do they even do? Don't they know there's a Presidential Election coming up? Maybe they should take a break from living until Donald fucking Trump decides to be less entertaining - then MAYBE we'll give them some attention oh wait nope never it's State Congress who gives a FUUUUUUUUCK!!

This is how all great papers begin.

Chapter 1 - Civil War Nostalgia

If there's one thing America looks back on fondly, it's that wonderful period in our history when we were able to cleanly divide ourselves into two major factions, split almost perfectly down the middle, who proceeded to de-humanize and vilify each other before eventually declaring all-out war, bringing previously unheard of frustration and turmoil onto American Soil.

Yes, the 90's were magical. Plus MOON-BOOTS, amiright?! Wonderful.

Guys, come on. We all know Political Parties are bad. It's not just an unoriginal idea, it's so old it's a cliché. It'd be like if, today (May 10, 2016), I pitched NBC the idea of a show about 6 friends who hang out at a Coffee Shop and eventually all sleep together. I know that analogy becomes a little clouded by NBC's inability to stop making this show, but in all seriousness: even George Washington (aka the big mamma-jamma himself) knew they were bad and urged the entire nation when he left office not to let them become a thing.

Washington's farewell address summed up: Thanks everybody, this has been a super good time, I'm really grateful for all the nice things you said about me, OH AND WATCH OUT FOR POLITICAL PARTIES, THERE'S NO WAY THEY END WELL FOR FUCKING ANYBODY."

If you're new to American sensationalism, let me catch you up with what's going on: As individuals, we recognize now more than ever before in history that every single one of us is unique, special, and different. We are all capable of drawing singular conclusions based on our widely-ranging histories, upbringings, and influences. We are all irreplaceable star-snowflakes, entitled to our own never-ending opinions, viewpoints, and ways of life.

That having been said, there are only two ways to run this country and dammit-all if they aren't the exact polar opposites of each other.

But how are over 300-million American viewpoints being represented by only two political parties? Short answer: They're not. Long answer: This paper.

Political ideology is a series of many many spectrums each person holds inside themselves, not unlike spectrums of sexuality. Yeah you've got super-conservatives on one side, and ultra-liberals on the other, but there's a bunch of people in the middle who don't need to put labels on anything you know, or definitely felt something when he brushed hands with his co-worker Mark, or maybe only **dates** guys but did some freaky stuff with Wendy at last week's Themed Gathering.

Also, we've been conditioned to think this is INSANE, but to any reasonable human being who's just been introduced to Democracy, it should be perfectly reasonable to vote for a candidate who's both pro-choice and pro-fracking (if that's what you believe) in the same way I'm pretty solidly heterosexual but also enjoy butt-stuff when I'm excited (Politics Part II: Return of the Rolling Pin).

So, right from the very get go, the idea of political parties is seriously flawed. It's failed it's only job thus far: to represent the American people's ideology. You had one job, Political Parties, and you screwed the pooch. To even approach any semblance of proper representation, there should be like a bunch more parties. How many more? 8? Sure.

WE WOULD NEED AT LEAST 8 MORE POLITICAL PARTIES TO FIX AMERICA FOREVER!

Wait, what's that? America doesn't want ANY more political parties? Seems kind of counter-productive, but I'll follow you here - why don't they want any more political parties?

Oh, that's right, because they make everything so damn easy.

So, you're slightly conservative? Cool, no need to research anyone running for any office - just mark that Red R with the fun Elephant cartoon straight down your ballot and you're set for life! In many places, it will be especially easy because when you tell the people running your poll that you are, in fact, a Republican, they'll happily provide you with a ballot with only the Republican nominees! That way, you'll never accidentally

choose one of those satan-fellating socialists to represent you as Greene County Deputy of Public Health.

So, you're a minority or a young-person raised by conservatives? Cool, no need to research anyone running for any office - just slide an extra tax-dollar down the blue hole marked D and settle into the smug satisfaction that, even if you don't understand the nuance of any single issue, you're at least on the right side of history. As you're voting, take a look at the weirdos off to the side who didn't align with a political party, instead choosing to say they were "Independent" or "unassociated". Yes, they look a little sad - probably because in many places, independent voter ballots aren't outfitted with candidates who align themselves with parties, leaving only a couple non-partisan issues left on the ballot. OH WELL! On your way out, don't forget to high-five Alec Baldwin and Bill Maher, furiously masturbating just outside to the sight of a farmer's guns being taken away!

Americans simply don't have the time to learn. Yes, we live in a digital age of almost limitless information at our very fingertips, but the technology that makes it all possible ALSO introduced us to Orange is the New Black, a viewing responsibility that will suck up any free time left after we get home from the jobs we famously work tirelessly at without ever slacking off at all. What are we to do?! Easy: instead of actually following what's happening with our government, we'll pour any energy we have into one election that takes place every four years and the rest of the time we'll just vote along party lines blindly because I HAVE TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENS TO WALT AND JESSE!

Speaking of Walt and Jesse, I have to mention how cool it feels to have such open conflict between two parties with such clear ideologies. As a person/cog in the society-machine who was raised on endless movies and television programs with clear protagonists and antagonists, the elimination of any shades of grey from my government is just so much more digestible!

It's pretty easy for the press to report on too: "Reportedly, Democrats in Congress are very interested in passing H.R. 452, but looks like they're going HEAD TO HEAD WITH MITCH McConnell IN THIS SUNDAY'S PAY-PER-VIEW BACKYARD BRAWL! OOOOOO THAT'S RIGHT, HARRY REID WANTS THE HEAVY-WEIGHT BELT AND BOY IS HE STEAMED! TUNE IN THIS SUNDAY IF YOU ENJOY FEELING LIKE YOU'RE A GENIUS WHILE ALL THE REPUBLICANS ARE CLEARLY IDIOTS AND HISTORY WILL REMEMBER YOUR TEAM AS 100% RIGHT ABOUT EVERYTHING WITHOUT FAIL! ONLY ON HBO!"

We all know the truth somewhere inside us: Michael Bay, despite his duds, is actually a pretty good director. ALSO, there's no reason Congressmen, government workers, or the world in general has to divide themselves like this. Even if they insist on it for reasons of convenience, they should still be able to act reasonably, and even support bills or ideas from across the aisle instead of treating half the country as enemies to your

cause. That's what we insist on doing, however, because when you know literally nothing about what's happening in the government, it's super easy to be hand-fed a juicy "us vs. them" narrative and assume the whole thing is just fucked:

"We have to get these corrupt politicians out of Congress!" -You, while eating a snow-cone and steadfastly refusing to look up what happened on the Congressional floor yesterday.

Us not knowing the "minutiae" of what happens throughout the government, and especially in Congress, gives that government an INSANE amount of power. Remember, we're a representative democracy (if you didn't know that already, you may re-assign a small portion of blame to the Texas educational system), so the way we hold these men and women accountable for their actions is by voting for them or not voting for them. If Mitch McConnell does something that really pisses you off, the way you make him not do that thing is by:

- 1) Writing him this letter: "Dear Senator McConnell, You piss me off. STOP. Try not being a pissy little piss-ant and please please keep the Senate Running for the good of America. Enclosed, you will find some lotion - apply liberally to the neck and shoulders when outside to avoid sunburns. You just look like the kind of guy who burns easy. IN HELL."
- 2) Then, and this is important, YOU SEE WHAT HE DID IN RESPONSE TO YOUR LETTER. Did he continue acting like a pissy little piss-ant? Did he keep the Senate Running? Did he apply the lotion liberally when walking outside? If not, DON'T VOTE FOR HIM AGAIN. Whether he's Republican or Democrat, the most important aspect of a representative in Congress should be that they respond to the wishes of their constituency - would you sacrifice your voice in our American government so you can "win" some random contest between two political parties?

The answer is yes. We have all already done that. Mitch McConnell CAN'T BE STOPPED. Why? Because he isn't held accountable to the American people. He's held only accountable to his party - the source of his power. The American people don't know what the hell is going on with ole' Mitchy, apart from some headlines shouted by super attractive new-anchors while we were getting ready for work, trying to eat only the Marshmallows from around the Lucky Charms. Mitch comes from the solidly Republican State of Kentucky, so, short of doing something brash and inexcusable like SUPPORTING THE DEMOCRATIC PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, he knows he can act however he likes and still get reelected.

And to be fair, reader (to whom most certainly the lion's share of blame belongs), I've said nothing so far that would make a healthy government impossible. There's no reason why, even with the existence of two all-powerful political parties, resolute and iron-clad Congressman couldn't still make a point to represent their constituency and act in the best interests of the nation. There are, however, several tiny little variables that make it difficult. I think you know the biggest one: money.

Chapter 2 - That Sweet Sweet Green

Let's assume for a moment the people who run our country aren't a statistically impossible gathering of sadists and psychopaths. I'll wait a moment while the entire nation shifts mental gears.

....

Great. Let's instead assume they're just people. Good ole' fashioned, American people. Human Classic, as the servers call us at a fast-food restaurant on a distant, predatory planet. The only difference between a normal person and a politician: they have a little bit of an ego, a little bit of a narcissism problem, and an over-inflated sense of justice/their own correct view of it. There's nothing wrong with that! They decide to channel those character quirks in a positive way by becoming politicians, the same way I channel my overwhelming desire to be liked into stupid jokes about rolling pins and whales.

Politicians aren't inherently bad people, drawn to politics because deep inside they CRAVE POWER and they're willing to sit through as many boring speeches, hundred-page bills, and general lack of appreciation to get it. They're typically good people or, just short of that, normal people who are trying their best to help. They got into the government game because they want to make the world a better place - they believe their ideals are the answer to America's problems, whether or not they'd ever state it so clearly.

But let's also remember a seat in Congress is more than a passion project - it's a job. Nobody spends the day out painting trees then comes home, covered in sweat, and works through the spiraling intricacies of a national budget as a hobby - it's a livelihood. And the only way to KEEP that job is to keep getting elected.

But uh-oh! As we've already established, you don't know what the hell is going on in Congress, nor do you have any nuanced idea of what your representatives in Congress stand for. This puts government individuals in a tricky spot, because when the American public doesn't truly hold them accountable for their actions YES they are operating with unheard of amounts of freedom BUT when it comes time for re-election, they're basically at the whims of fate.

OR ARE THEY?

Turns out the only currency that matters to getting someone elected is actual currency. Money, baby. Greenbacks. Currency Classic, as it's called by the alien customer who just ordered two large humans with a side of Whale Fin.

Since we don't bother to do any actual research into the majority of our candidates, the only way they can get through to us is by screaming "VOTE FOR ME!" through every shiny object we're distracted by. When that doesn't do the trick, they can make stuff up! They can lie about their opponents! They can make blatant efforts to guilt you or scare you! They can make unapologetically racist or bigoted remarks! They can

make outrageous claims about what they're going to do in office - even if it is constitutionally illegal - it doesn't matter!

The fact is, we don't know enough about any of the situations to accurately see the truth through the bullshit. Most of us are smart enough to go "Hmmm....I can tell part of what I'm eating here is shit. But which part? Is it the patty? Is it the bun? Wait, is this solid shit? JESUS, IT'S NOT EVEN SHAPED LIKE A BURGER, IT'S JUST A SHIT! WHY IS MY HEAD IN THIS TOILET?!?!"

^America + Donald Trump^

And yes, it's easy to blame the media for failing to represent the full truth of the world to us (they claim it's their job, after all) but we have to realize that, with no real accountability for their actions, the media is driven by the same force as Congress:

MONEY.

So how does a well-meaning Senator get his hands on it?

Step 1: Don't you dare go against the doctrine of your political party.

American Government is a team-sport. An endless system of checks and balances is built into its DNA. If, for any reason, a senior party-member in Congress decides that some junior Senator is acting out of line, they can pull the rug out from under him. Support from within his own party will dry up. And even if he's ideologically aligned with the other side of the aisle, that doesn't mean that other side will be there to help him (Mitch McConnell was quoted last week saying he wasn't going to push any bi-partisan bills through Congress until the Presidential Elections were concluded). Unless you are one of those legendary Congressmen (like Bernie Sanders or Moltres the Fire Bird Pokemon) with a huge amount of support and notability among your constituents, your own political party could turn you into an unelectable pariah (Magicarp) for not falling in line.

And that's not even taking into account the **financial** support political parties give their members come election season.

But enough of that garbage, right?! Let's get into the facts. If there's one thing America loves it's facts. Or, if not facts, then the semblance of facts. Confident opinions will often suffice. Rumors involving an attractive person can be admissible if it's a slow news day. Or literally any day.

So here's a fact:

Chuck Schumer, Senior Senator of New York State, is running for re-election this November. Now, as we know, being elected is all about money - specifically how much you have (as opposed to your stance on money in general). That's great news for Senator Schumer, because he's got a bunch of it (likely as a result of his somewhat hazy stance on it). To be specific, according to OpenSecrets.org, he's raised over 20 million dollars already, just in case.

I say "Just in case" because wow-o-wow are things heating up in this New York State Senatorial race. I'll tell you what, Senator Schumer is really gonna have to pull out

his A-game if he wants to stave off the onslaught of LITERALLY NOTHING. Knowing Democrats outnumber Republicans 2-1 in New York, the GOP has JUST NOW nominated Wendy Long (who I'm sure is a great candidate, and I mean no insult to her at all) to run against Mr. Schumer, who has already raised over 20 million towards his cause. The last time the GOP sent Ms. Long campaigning was in 2012 against junior Senator of New York, Kirsten Gillibrand. Gillibrand raised 15 million dollars. Long? A paltry, pathetic, almost non-existent 784 thousand.

Why the difference? Because the Republican Party has given up New York, a strategic move with dangerous social implications. If you've ever played a game of RISK, I think you know exactly what I'm talking about. You've made an alliance with your friend to defend Ukraine in exchange for his not attacking Brazil (not unlike the tacit agreement between members of a party and its leadership where they agree to vote for the party in exchange for their views presenting a united front in the Federal Government). But as the game goes on, powers start to shift, and you realize if you moved your promised reinforcements from around Ukraine straight into Brazil, you wouldn't have to worry about being conquered there (if GOP leadership invests their resources in states where they have a better chance of winning, they can win more states). The only downside is that your friend, who you made an alliance with (The American People), is now left high, dry, and open to attack from the third person playing this game: DEMOCRATS.

The analogy is rock-solid, nobody can argue with that. The point is that even though they don't hold a majority, there are still MILLIONS of Republicans in New York State left without any representation, not because their candidates lost elections but because the parties which represent those candidates did not adequately support them.

There's a big difference there - does power come from the people, or from political parties?

But we'll put that aside for a moment. Back to Senator Schumer.

"No, Collin, no!" You scream from the comment thread, "We want to hear more about Wendy Long!"

There's no time. Ms. Long isn't going to be elected and everybody knows it. We must move on.

So where did Chuck Schumer get his Scrooge McDuck-esque swimming pool of campaign funds? Well, thankfully, that information is available to you online at a number of political research websites (I got my numbers from OpenSecrets.org, but there's a ton of others). Going to these websites is extra fun not only because of their unique insight into the flawed world of campaign finances, but also because you are likely the first person to visit them (not counting the writing team at The Colbert Report).

The top ten contributors to Senator Schumer's campaign (accounting for a gasp-inducing \$819,638) are Blackstone Group, Lazard Ltd, NorPAC, Alphabet Inc, Fragomen, Del Rey et al, Apple Inc, BlackRock Inc, New York Life Insurance, York

Capital Management, and Regeneron Pharmaceuticals. There's a pattern here. While **you** might not be able to spot it, **I've** seen the DaVinci code upwards of twice, and was able to pick it out after only 10 minutes of reading through those names: They're not people.

Which is a problem when elections are essentially decided by campaign spending.

I mean, it opens the door to some big big issues which, don't you worry your sweet little freckles, I'll get to in a moment, but also hides one concern in plain sight: It gives companies and interest-groups far more power to decide political policy than the people who those policies will affect. No man or woman (definitely not a woman considering how much less they get paid for the same work as men, but that's a different essay entirely), is going to donate \$105,300 to a candidate. They might donate \$20, \$50, even \$10,000 if you're AFFLUENT and wear a monocle (and laugh like an arrogant seal), but the real money comes from the corporations.

Even if we assumed for a moment that these corporations are simply trying to defend themselves, as is their right under the law, by supporting candidates whose platforms coincide with their own interests, IT'S STILL NOT GOOD! Yes, people get the final vote, but a fat lot of good that does when corporations decide who's on the ticket by sheer force of MONEY. In our current political landscape, it almost seems like you won't ever get a chance to have people vote for you until you've accepted funds from some non-human entity. The closest anyone has come is, of course, Senator Bernie Sanders who, though none of his major contributors are businesses, still receives his largest donations from Labor Unions (The largest? \$13,500.) But even in the smallest campaigns, most of the money, and therefore the political sway, is determined by entities which hold their profits in mind prior to the interest of the American People. Surely that's not good.

But we'll put that aside for a moment. Back to Senator Schumer.

"No, Collin, no!" You call my cell-phone to say, "We want to hear more about Senator Sanders!"

"Who are you?!" I scream, "How did you get this number? HOW DO YOU PEOPLE KEEP FINDING ME?!"

"Also," I wryly shoot in, "There's no time. Bernie's views on the deeply troubling campaign finance system, though perhaps completely correct, are a bit of a long-shot while trying to win IN THAT SYSTEM when individuals don't do the research to understand the scope of the problem on their own."

Here's another crazy fact: remember the largest contributor to Chuck Schumer's campaign? That's right, Blackstone Group. Excellent memory! What? Yes, that's right, they contributed \$105,300. You looked that one up on your own? I am so proud of you right now, you wouldn't even believe it.

And you're correct, his largest campaign contributor is Blackstone Group, "a global investment firm involved in private equity, investment banking, asset management and financial services. Known as one of the largest investors in leveraged buyout

transactions, the Blackstone Group is the parent organization of Hilton Worldwide, Travelport, SeaWorld Entertainment and other large companies.” (opensecrets.com).

That’s right, Blackstone: that pure-of-heart investment firm who represents such beloved companies as Paris Hilton’s namesake and the people who made Blackfish possible. If you’re panties are in a twist, YOU JUST WAIT! It gets better.

Yes, Blackstone gave a huge amount of money to Chuck Schumer, an elite member of the Democratic leadership, but they also gave money to a few other people. Here’s one you might have heard of: Mitch McConnell (\$175,000). Also, The **Democratic** Senatorial Campaign Committee (\$523,200). ALSO, the National **REPUBLICAN** Senatorial Committee (\$387,250).

I guess SeaWorld has bounced back pretty good, because Blackstone has plenty of money to throw around.

What does this mean? I think you already know, you sly little fox.

It means these organizations aren’t just supporting the candidates who align with their interests. They’re buying future influence in Congress - political ideology makes no difference.

Why else would the a single company make huge investments in someone as far left as Schumer and as far right as McConnell? Maybe they just believe in bi-partisan politics? I don’t think so. That, as you know, IS IMPOSSIBLE!!!!

To be fair, Blackstone is huge, multi-tiered organization and it’s within the realm of possibility that they represent multiple companies whose interests align with different candidates (though that, as we’ve already established, is also bad), but come on. We all know a company’s only interest is profit. So, if at any point it makes good business sense to use the power they have over candidates to influence policy, they’re going to use it regardless of what side of the aisle they donated to, for what reasons, or the context that money was given in.

BUT THAT’S NOT THEIR FAULT! It’s so important to realize none of these people are to blame (entirely). Are you going to get on some multi-billion dollar corporation’s case for being business-savvy while staying 100% within the confines of the law? Are you going to get pissy with your Congressmen, who only did what she had to do to get elected so she could pass some legislation protecting the interests of your sorry ass? They want to help you, that’s just the way things were when they started playing the game. No, the blame lies with someone else.

That’s right, it’s everyone’s favorite time of the chapter, the part where I blame YOU!

(and me)

We are the people who allowed the system to become this way. By failing to stay informed about the actual inner workings of our government and completely knowledgeable about the issues at hand, we let those who would (through no fault of their own) manipulate the system for their own gain hold sway in Washington, and we’re now

too lazy and fed-up to do anything about it. By refusing to see shades of gray between endless, segregating dichotomies, we've supported partisan representation that actively **discourages** any nuanced thinking or cooperation between good people on either side of the aisle. I'm tempted to say we should all be sent to prison, but of course we've let the prison system slip into such a sorry condition I'm not sure even **we** deserve that...which, of course, means we deserve it all the more....but oh jesus, it's SOOO BAD....you can see a bit of a loop forming here, I'll let you extrapolate on your own time.

Listen, I have to get some feelings out. Bear with me for a moment:

Chapter 3 - An Open Letter to Mitch McConnell

Dear Senator McConnell,

First of all, thank you for your work in passing S. 799: Protecting Our Infants Act of 2015 last year. I've just read through a quick summary of it's purpose and effects - it seems like a necessary step in our healthcare process though I'm of course no expert on the subject, having eaten nothing but cheese for the past 12 hours.

I wanted to thank you for your work because you're doing what most people aren't brave enough or interested enough to pursue: representing the American People in our government. There aren't many higher callings (short of that healthcare I mentioned earlier).

What's more, I think you're good at your job. After looking into you for a little while, you seem like a very smart, deeply passionate man who truly believes in his party's doctrine and I can respect that. I don't believe you to be evil, stupid, corrupt, or even wrong about your views, though we may have many disagree on many points. I think you, like any true Republican or Democrat, know that the ideals held by yourself and the party are what's best for the American People. Which is exactly how it's supposed to be.

However, I've recently read in the American Media (in whom I think we've found a source of mutual annoyance) about several courses of action you, and your fellow Senators, plan on pursuing in the coming months. They left me feeling somewhat disturbed and uneasy about the state of our government and so I felt it was my responsibility, as a citizen, to approach you as an equal and relay my thoughts.

Now what's this I hear about Congressional Republicans refusing to even consider a Supreme Court Justice until the upcoming election (the one 8 months from now)? From my perspective, that seems a bit ridiculous if you ask me. It might take the President as long as a month to find a candidate (if he hadn't nominated Merrick Garland today) and then, even if Congress were to slow down to a snail's pace, there's no reason reviewing the candidate should take us all the way up until next January's inauguration.

So this isn't about timeline. That's another thing I like about you: you call a spade a spade. You've been very up front about your intentions. You very much disagree with President Obama's policies and think America has the right to wait for the next President to appoint a Supreme Court Justice (who will probably be with us for goodness knows how many years after President Obama has left office).

From your perspective, I can see how this course of action makes sense. It's a little sneaky, yes, but I get it - if you believe Democratic policies are destructive to American society, and the Republican way of thinking is the answer to our problems, then being a little bit of a sneak for 8 months is certainly worth it.

But I'm honestly not so concerned about lacking a Supreme Court Justice for half-a-year. I'm far more concerned about the us vs. them dynamic; the one that's run rampant in our government and, if you'll forgive my saying so, you even seem to thrive on.

Why did you become a politician? I suspect it's because, whether through a belief in your platform or personal interest in the government, you wanted to help people. I also suspect it's so easy to get caught up in the political game of Republicans vs. Democrats that it's easy to forget those simplistic beginnings. Because, from the perspective of an outsider, refusing to consider an acting President's candidate for the Supreme Court amounts to holding the nation hostage. We're built on a system of checks and balances, but this action seems like you and your fellow senators taking advantage of that safety net to "check" a President into submission for simply doing his job. It seems like infighting. It seems like childish bickering. **Most importantly, it seems like your motives are removed from the best interests of the American People.**

Let us not forget, you represent our interests by **voting**, Senator. By neglecting to vote, you and your party are essentially saying "Step aside, American representative democracy, we're taking the wheel." At this point, it doesn't matter whether the nominee will get approved or not! What matters is that the American People's voices aren't being heard - only the voice of a party intent on winning a political victory.

We are not a nation divided, Senator. That's just how the system makes us vote. Across our country there are millions of viewpoints, all slightly different and hard to understand. No matter how you shake it down, trying to represent us as two clear teams locked in eternal battle will never result in a healthy government. What really disappoints me is that you **know** that, but instead of working to change it, you've consigned your brilliant mind to finding the best case scenario within this flawed premise.

Ok, you're right, you're right! Accepting you honestly believe your ideals are what's right for the country, I honestly can't think of any iron-clad, immediately noticeable reasons to put off nominating a Supreme Court Justice until a possibly Republican President takes office (beyond the fact that it's your civic duty and the proper method of representing the American People). I can, however, point out one YUUUUUGE result of repeated actions such as this.

His name is Donald Trump.

I don't care for Mr. Trump and I know you don't either.

After all the work - the years of your life - you've poured into trying to improve our great country, it's probably very frustrating to watch as voters flock towards a man not only unfit for the Presidency, but unfit for almost any public office in America. To watch your own party torn apart by what began as a bad, racist joke must keep you up at night wondering: Why do they like this man? How can the voters support him?

But the truth of the matter is Donald Trump's Presidential campaign has almost nothing to do with Donald Trump. The only thing anyone likes about Donald is of course his giant penis, and we didn't even know about that until he so kindly informed us during a nationally televised political debate.

No, Donald Trump is the desperate last hope for so many voters who feel let down and disenfranchised. He is nothing but the tantrum of a childish voting populace intent on reminding all the politicians in District 1 where the real power lies.

Unfortunately, the same ignorance that caused the behaviors they dislike in Congress has now lead them to blindly fall behind a candidate unfit for the Presidency. They don't understand the system - it's too nuanced to wrap the mind around, but too polarized to believe in. They're fed up and tired of feeling as though their voices aren't represented by politicians in Washington. Politicians they feel deep down they didn't have any voice in electing, by the way.

You see, as I've mentioned, you're a great candidate - but if I'm a conservative voter in Kentucky, there's no real option besides you, is there? I could vote for Dan Geddy, the up-start young conservative who has some big ideas about how America should be behaving, but we know all the campaign money from The GOP / various interest groups is going to you (the current Senate Majority Leader), and besides: Dan has his hands full with a new Ferret Breeding Program. Dan - always with his big ideas!

If you're reading this letter in the context of the essay it's included in, you'll know i don't blame you or your fellow Congressmen for any of this! You're doing the best you can when the bedrock of our democracy is an electorate too lazy and ill-informed to make any significant contribution to the political process. However, to be fair, while the current situation is certainly understandable, and your actions reasonable, that's not to say there weren't other courses that could have led us towards a GOP Presidential Nominee famous for *creating* jobs rather than taking them away.

As an American citizen, I'd love to hear more about the Parties actively working together and submitting bi-partisan bills on issues they don't agree on. This might really help! Compromises will be necessary, and the resulting bills will likely be far more watered down than either party will like, but I would imagine these bills would better represent the American People, the majority of whom are somewhat moderate. And just imagine the headlines!

CNN: “Mitch McConnell, Chuck Schumer have serious talk, write good bill that frustrates both sides but enacts useful change in our nation, make silly joke, become fast friends!”

MSNBC: “Mitch McConnell, Harry Reid discuss their feelings over Lattes, decide they both love America, plan trip to Buffalo!”

Fox: “HILLARY CLINTON WILL MURDER YOU!”

That’s the America I want to live in!

But then, just when the dream was within reach, I hear about this thing you said! As Senate Majority Leader, you recently mentioned not putting any bi-partisan bills up for a vote until after the election! You can imagine, given the stance I’ve laid out above, how that might make me want to curl my toes and go “ooooh!!” while wagging my fist and squinting one eye shut.

Once again, I get it. Politically, it makes sense. It’s going to be a tough election season for both sides, and you don’t want your party “endorsing” any across-the-aisle wins. Also, by refusing to respond to bi-partisan efforts, it paints the picture of a separated Congress to the American People who, as we both know, don’t do enough research to understand the reality of the situation - that, essentially, you’re leveraging a fictional dichotomy into political power for your party.

Yes, it sounds shady, but if you truly believe your party is working towards the greater good, it makes sense. You are the hero in your story.

But come on! Surely you must be aware no hero begins their story with “I knew I was destined to save the world the day I refused to cooperate with good people who want the same thing I do, though we have some disagreements on the best way to reach the end goal of a stronger nation.” Yes, that’s something Frank Underwood would turn and say to the camera in a charismatic southern drawl but, let’s face it, you’re hardly House of Cards Material, Mr. McConnell - that is unless an upcoming plotline centers around the Underwood family turtle.

So, even as I try to remember you’re the hero of your own story, imagine how I feel when I hear you’re considering tabling all bi-partisan legislation until after the elections. I shouldn’t even have to elaborate on why it’s a bad idea. Politically, I’m sure it makes sense, but laws aren’t just points to be won in the grand political Game of Thrones - they’re decisions that enact change to help people, even SAVE LIVES. And surely the laws that we can actually get these two sides of the aisle to agree on aren’t the ones we should be IGNORING!

I’m sorry about shouting like that, I don’t want to fight with you. I don’t want to lecture you, and I don’t want to make you feel small. I’m just trying to share my feelings with you: your actions are really frustrating me. I’m glad there are people like you in Congress, I just wish you’d work more with the people who aren’t like you. This feels super similar to how I might end a fight with my girlfriend, so what do you say the two of us just go take care of some house work while we cool down and I’m sure, by the end of

the day, we'll be cuddling on the couch watching the Princess Bride and laughing about this whole ordeal. Sound good? Cool.

XOXO,

Collin

Chapter 4 - Who's Afraid of the Big Bad President?

What's easier to remember? A never-ending parliamentary compendium of random names and dates, or one guy we imagine as responsible for everything that happens in the entire nation.

You get the idea by now, right? We're lazy bums. Yes, The President of the United States is the most important man or woman in our government. However, he or she is just the biggest piece of a huge, GIANT, **MASSIVE PUZZLE** (which will look like a pretty boat when it's finished!). Ask any political scientist which is the most powerful branch of our government and they will surely reply: The legislative! After you ask, they will also go home and celebrate that their diploma was finally good for something.

The legislative branch makes the laws, the Executive is charged with enforcing them. Of course there's some overlap, but in a perfect system, The President is basically Congress's bitch - executing their laws and getting their shit done while they sip tea or whatever Congress does when they're not busy perfecting C-SPAN's late-80's production value.

So here's a reality-checking question: why do we expect the President to make promises about how he will change the country? Whether you support universal healthcare or not, why is The President expected to be leading the charge on a bill to get it passed? Obviously, The President is a powerful man or woman and, if POTUS puts his (ha) mind to it, they'll be able to get something done. BUT IS IT REALLY THEIR JOB?

The answer is not really. We've kind of made it the President's job by paying attention to Presidential elections and The President himself 10,000% more than we pay attention to any other facet of the government he/she is but a cog in. If a Presidential Candidate ran on the platform "I have my own private opinions about healthcare reform, but promise to uphold the duties of my office by executing the laws passed in Congress to the best of my abilities, regardless of their outcome." he'd be laughed out of Washington, regardless of her/his political party! Heck, he'd be laughed out of Beaver-Vu-Bowl, the bowling alley I used to play at in Beavercreek, Ohio because WHY WOULD YOU RUN FOR PRESIDENT THERE?!

So now the President is basically expected to both execute the laws and take a major role in creating them. That alone should be setting off big red flags. **Real** big. Like "**Mark and I are just friends now! I mean, we used to sleep together a lot, but now**

he's just my best friend I share everything with."-big. But on top of that, it's far more than we should expect of one person because it's far more than that office is able to do well.

We can EXPECT whatever we want of the President. Trust me, Congressmen and women have no problem being left to their own devices while we place all the glory **and blame** on some guy somewhere else. But no matter what we expect of him, that won't change the limitations of his office - the checks and balances that keep each branch of our government in place. We could elect the perfect President in November, but without the support of Congress, he is NOTHING. NOTHING, DO YOU HEAR ME?! NOOOOOOOOTHING!!!!!! *rips of shirt, bellows into night sky*

By all means, please pay a lot of attention to the Presidential election. But pay just as much attention to the Congressional elections, because what happens in the legislative branch is just as important as anything the President does, if not more so. The homework for tomorrow is to read Pages 350-373 in your textbook. The bell doesn't dismiss you, I dismiss you.

Chapter 5 - An Inconvenient Choice

As I write this, the Presidential election has been narrowed down to two pretty presumptive Party nominees: Ole' Donnie Trump and H.R. Clinton. A lot of people are pretty angry about that because they don't like either of these candidates very much but will now have to vote for one or the other.

Except that you don't. What if I told you - and really prepare yourself for this, because it's going to blow your brain wide open - what if I told you there were OTHER CANDIDATES. What if I told you there will be 4, possibly 5 candidates for President this November. Because that's the crazy world we live in, folks. Though they don't show up immediately on Google when you search "Presidential Candidates", Gary Johnson (Libertarian), Jill Stein (Green Party), and possibly Jesse Ventura are all in the running to become President. But since they're not part of the big parties, they aren't real people and thus aren't real candidates so nobody pays them any attention.

DON'T YOU SEE WHAT THAT MEANS?! Honestly, if you're kind enough to read this deep into the paper, I don't care whether you understand or not. Thank you for your time, sir or madam. **BUT DON'T YOU SEE?!** There are people - millions and millions of people - who are completely ignoring what they believe in to vote for what is, in their mind, the lesser of two evils. That's not what democracy is about! We're supposed to vote for the candidates who represent our ideologies, otherwise it's just an advertising contest between two super-rich people!

I can see how some strategy might play into voting. If you align best with Jill Stein of the Green Party but you know EVERY conservative is going to get behind Donald Trump, you might want to support Hillary to help avoid a Crisis on Infinite Earths

situation. But the fact is we should never be put into a position where we have to mindlessly line up behind candidates, simplifying our beliefs and compromising our ideals so we get to choose between “Awful” or “meh” levels of representation!

We should be demanding candidates who hold our ideals. Well, I suppose we already do that. Let me rephrase - we should be demanding more candidates, each of whom has their own ideals, and then we should each vote for the one we agree most with. The current system (demanding 2 people hold the perfect combination of all our ideals without exploding) isn't a big hit with **anybody**.

Simply supporting election policy reform could be a huge step towards making this happen! But we must never forget to push the idea as well! Always be asking yourself “What if things were good? How can I make it that way”. It will help you sleep.

Chapter 6 - What should I do?

Well, like, how the hell should I know? I'm a nobody. A comedian living in Brooklyn. Don't get your advice from me. Get your advice from you! Go figure the world out! Know who your Congressmen are, and what they're voting on. Know where you stand on all the platforms. Know what the platforms are and study them on non-partisan sites with no agenda other than the edification of the people.

Here's the truth: we're constantly being force-fed biased information. On the Television. On our Facebook feeds. From our friends. The reason this information is so convenient and willing to come to you is because it has an agenda. It's trying to make a point. But that's not what you need. Before you jump into the political ring, you just need to know the facts and how you feel about them. Do your own research and take a week off worrying about what the world insists you pay attention to.

Register to vote and then vote for the candidate who best represents your opinions. It may be a candidate who has no shot at winning. There is no honor in voting for a candidate you don't truly want to see in office just because they have a better chance of winning. There's no “Vote Police” that comes to your door after elections to make sure you're on the right side of history. The only way to express your own opinions is to vote for the candidate who represents them, even if they're not one of the two “big guys”.

Donate a couple dollars to a candidate you like. Write letters to your Congressman. Speak out against legislation you don't agree with. For God sakes just do anything but cool it with the Facebook statuses, I can't take it anymore. That's what this whole thing has been secretly about - I'd really like to clean up my feed. Please help me with that.

Go online to sites like govtrack.us or opensecrets.org and really take a good look at what your representatives have been up to! These are WEBSITES and you can reach them on your INTERNET BROWSER just by clicking the links above. Finding your Congressman or woman is super easy! Just do it!

Alright, I'm tired now. That's enough. Moral of the story: We need more female directors in the modern film industry. Slightly less-important sub-moral: **Without moving from your chair, you can fix our government by taking 10 minutes to learn a little bit about the people who represent you in Congress and rewarding or punishing their behaviors with your vote.** As the great political philosopher Prince Adam once quipped: "I HAVE THE POWER!"

And so can you.