



# Respect: The Bridge Between Natural Rights and a Free Society

In the northeast corner of the United States lies an enigma in the vicious world of American politics. Vermont, one of the nation's bluest states, is governed by a Republican - one who has held his position for three terms. Phil Scott, governor of Vermont since 2000, has never lost an election, despite being a conservative in left-leaning territory. A lifelong Republican, Scott has transcended party lines throughout his career and been a champion for something missing in modern American politics: separation of people from politics. Scott is an advocate for LGBTQ+ rights, is pro-choice, and has made Vermont one of the few states to require health insurance. While he still intends on remaining in the Republican Party, Scott has detached political ideals and human rights, something lacking amongst most politicians today.

Growing up in a time where opposing beliefs were immediately invalidated, I often witnessed conservatives label the left as identity-obsessed snowflakes, while Democrats painted Republicans as racists and homophobes. Rather than set their differences aside to meet in the middle, both parties get too caught up playing a game that neither can win, too busy incessantly disparaging one another to make any change. Republicans have coined themselves the "Party of Parents" and the voice of the working class, with Democrats emphasizing social equality and equal opportunity. Yet what both fail to acknowledge are indisputable human rights and the importance of respect. Without these vital understandings, the ongoing cycle of marginalization will be perpetuated, but will be lost in the cloud of hostile political polarization.

But before we can understand politics, we must understand the concept of natural rights. The United Nations proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, a document that established fundamental human rights that are protected. The UDHR preserves the right to life, liberty, security, and security. The UDHR also upholds that everyone be seen as equal in the eyes of the law, with no exceptions. However, these natural rights have been violated time and time again by both sides of the political spectrum, despite both parties' attempts to appeal as "ethical."

President Trump, for instance, enacted inhumane border policies that ripped millions of migrant children from their families, also allowing children to be detained in cages. But instead of alleviating the humanitarian crisis at the border as promised, under the Biden administration, even more detention centers have sprung to life. These actions from both administrations have gone against the right to liberty and the right to seek asylum articulated in the UDHR, and contradict the American ideal as the “land of opportunity”. Moreover, a critical part missing from American politics is the lack of bipartisanship and respect for the other side. While Trump and Biden had similar immigration policies, they could not help but be vulgar to each other. In the 2020 presidential election debate, both Trump and Biden each crossed the line over and over again. Trump crudely condemned Biden for his son's drug use, while Biden referred to his opponent as a “clown”, eventually even asking Trump to “shut up”. It seems that at the core of American democracy is an unwillingness to learn about diverging viewpoints, with people retreating into their own corners and demonizing any opposition. Civility is rare, respect even rarer, and that is arguably the barrier that prevents dire crises from being resolved.

My political beliefs have admittedly been influenced by my liberal peers and environment for the majority of my life. But now, having understood that everyone has an indubitable right to basic freedoms and that humanity, not politics, is the basis of society, the divides between good and evil have been lifted. After all, being a Democrat doesn't make you a just and righteous person, and being a Republican doesn't make you corrupt or villainous. What truly solidifies freedom is the ability to embrace, not shame, differences. What defines a free society is the capacity to not just accept all people, but to learn to understand them, no matter who they are, where they came from, or what their opinions are. We are so much more than what we believe, and every single person, whether or not you agree with them, ought to be deserving of an open mind and an open heart.

## Works Cited

Berman, Russell. "America's Bluest State Loves Its Republican Governor." The Atlantic, Atlantic Media Company, 21 May 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2021/05/phil-scott-vermont-republican/618944/>.

"Biden Vowed to Close a Border Migrant Camp, Then a Worse One Emerged under His Watch." Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Times, 3 Sept. 2021, <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2021-09-03/biden-vowed-to-close-a-border-migrant-camp-then-under-his-watch-a-worse-one-emerged>.

Flagg, Anna, and Andrew Rodriguez Calderón. "Trump Detained More Migrant Children at the Border for Far Longer than We Knew." The Marshall Project, The Marshall Project, 30 Oct. 2020, <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2020/10/30/500-000-kids-30-million-hours-trump-s-vast-expansion-of-child-detention>.

Montanaro, Domenico. "Trump Derails 1st Presidential Debate with Biden, and 5 Other Takeaways." NPR, NPR, 30 Sept. 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/09/30/918500976/trump-derails-first-presidential-debate-with-biden-and-5-other-takeaways>.

"Universal Declaration of Human Rights." United Nations, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.