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1st Amendment Essay

It is the great American stereotype: parents sit at the kitchen table, newspapers spread out between them, their brows furrowed in concern as the television flashes polls, news, and statistics. And where is their teen? Huddled in the corner, face plastered to a screen. She takes one look at the political anchor's analysis and, with a roll of her eyes, goes back to her phone. However, the reality for young adults is different. From their perspective, politics and international policy are locked behind the high walls of "grown up talk." Such topics are reserved for people with bills and votes, not for careless teenagers. As a result, both parties are turned off to the idea of a "family discussion" of politics, and the teens grow up to be adults disinterested in family or community discourse. The remedy? Local journalism.

National news organizations like NBC excel in covering international events, but do not communicate to smaller, more specific areas. These world events are still significant, but they undergo a certain filtering process before they reach specific citizens' hands. These handy little journalism machines are known as local news programs. State-scale journalism takes national issues and brings them to the attention of their respective audience. This allows residents in states like Indiana to sympathize with the fires in Australia or voice their concern for the conflicts in Iran. Local journalism starts a community discussion of a diverse set of topics. They can detail poll numbers, wildfires, government policies, and most significantly, how these affect the immediate area.

But how can local journalism get kids off those darn phones? How can it break through the lofty gates of the "grown-ups?" Simple. Give people a reason to invest. In every report or story, the purpose of the coverage is to foster interest; interest in a protest, in laws, or in political candidates. All local journalists would need to do is sharpen the focus of their reporting. For example, teens do not care about, say, the tariff negotiations with China. They are bored with steel and plastic cost statistics. However, what they would be interested to hear is that these

tariffs could change the price of the next Xbox, Playstation, and Nintendo Switch. They care about the price of car repairs and phone accessories. Suddenly the issue is hitting closer than they had thought, and, more importantly, they have skin in the game.

There is, of course, an argument against news programs taking time out of their schedules to connect with a teenage audience: they may not be truly engaged. This claim against wasting time is completely valid, because there is a form of local journalism that can be even more effective: school newspapers. These High School power-houses represent the voice of the students. They work to publish topics relevant to their age group, and are essential to inspiring community discourse. Even though community news broadcasts discuss notable events within their areas, they are not able to effectively and consistently connect with the young adult demographic. School Newspapers, however, can freely connect with students with relevant topics. Escalating conflict in Iran? A story on how students can and cannot be drafted. Coronavirus fears? Why students should practice personal health during the school day. By exploring stories on political policy and national affairs, student papers can inspire discussion even in screen-hungry teens.

Local journalism has a huge impact on community discourse, and it can become more prominent through small steps to better engage the public. High School newspapers can start the discussion among young adults. This contributes to toppling the heftiest hurdle; family discussion. By keeping students motivated to defend their views, school newspapers inspire a reason to argue. This leads to families challenging each other's views and sharpening their perspective of an issue. Day after day, a massive portion of the population takes a pass on discussion. These are the students and young adults who have not yet developed an interest in an issue. Local journalism is the catalyst for these discussions, and when the younger generation becomes involved in simple living-room politics, it empowers them to become active, issue-engaging adults. In short: public discourse starts with private discourse.