

DO WE EVEN CARE?

With the political world in turmoil as the government recovers from a partial shutdown drags with daily congressional gridlock, a President refusing to fold and a recent grueling Supreme Court confirmation battle in hindsight, it begs the question: "Are we paying attention?"

It is without doubt that political activity is at an all-time high with recent events taking place such as the March for Life and Women's March drawing in fervent supporters of various causes and issues. However, it does not appear that a majority of the younger generation is engaged in or cares for the ongoing political discourse.

For instance, the 2018 Midterm Elections were highly publicized as having major voter turnout among young Americans. Despite this being the narrative, only an estimated 31% of individuals ages 18 to 29 voted in the 2018 Midterms. Although this exceeded participation from the same age group in the 2014 midterms (21%), it was still much less than the amount of votes cast in the 2016 presidential election where 51% of Young Americans voted.

"I primarily voted in the midterms in order to have a say in the issues that I care most about," senior Zuhair Rahman said. "Simply voting can have a serious impact on my life which is why I encourage any students who are eligible to vote to have their voices heard."

With such close proximity to the epicenter of politics in the United States, Capitol Hill, political engagement at AHS appears to be on the low-end when compared to past years.

In past years, both a Young Republicans and Young Democrats club were meeting and active at AHS. Students who participated in these clubs completed activities such as campaigning door-to-door, phone banking and organizing events.

However, both clubs are now defunct as former Young Republicans sponsor Fred Zuniga retired last year and former Young Democrats sponsor Kellie Burke stepped down due to other commitments. Neither club has picked up steam or garnered student interest since.

“I think that there is a mix as far as student political engagement goes,” former Young Democrats Sponsor and Government teacher Kellie Burke said. “Some students think that it doesn’t matter and that they cannot impact politics and even if they are paying attention to what’s going on that they are not really going to make a difference.”

According to a survey conducted by *The A-Blast* during R5 on Jan. 24, only 26% of AHS students have previously participated in political events such as marches or rallies. In spite of this, students opt to take different routes when attempting to have an impact on social or political issues.

Amid the partial government shutdown, an estimated 800,000 government employees had been furloughed. As the shutdown lasted six weeks, federal workers missed multiple paychecks and had their household budgets upended. Many employees did not have access to basic needs such as food and as a result, food groups ramped up aid to these individuals.

At AHS multiple clubs and organizations such as Key Club, Red Cross, the National Social Studies Honor Society, BCAA, Mission Possible and more came together and began organizing a food drive in order to help those affected by the government shut down.

“There are several clubs who are a part of the food drive we are organizing and we hope to receive a lot of donations in order to help people who are struggling find a meal everyday due to the government shut down,” senior Hlina Wondwossen said.

When it comes to the classroom, the survey revealed that 60%

of students believe that they do not receive enough political exposure in school.

“I would think that most of the social studies teachers, especially History and Government, try to discuss why certain political events are taking place,” History and Social Studies teacher Jonathan York said.

Many students believe that politics should be more often discussed in class in order to spark interest.

“I think that if we talked more about current events and politics in class, more students would be interested,” Rahman said.

Typically in Government classes, current events are more of a focal point of the curriculum. However in other social studies classes such as history, current events and politics are less emphasized.

“Usually on Monday mornings in class, we try to discuss what went on in the news and current events,” York said. “However, we don’t spend that much time on it.”

Politics and ongoing world events not being focused on in class is potentially a determinant in causing students to be politically disengaged. Nevertheless, student disinterest may be a result of current events not impacting them directly.

“I think some students are not engaged with politics because it does not affect them directly which causes them to tune it out,” York said.

In addition to not thinking they receive enough political exposure in class, the survey revealed that approximately 40% of students follow political news such as the Presidency, Congress, and the Supreme Court only monthly or even less.

An overwhelming majority, 72% of students reported receiving most of their news via social media platforms such as Twitter.

This can result in individuals receiving incorrect and incomplete information as they read news in snippets of 150 characters or less.

It is imperative for this dynamic to change in coming years as not being an avid participant in current events can be detrimental for students later down the line.

“Although it could be exhausting, keeping up with politics will always be really important to me,” Rahman said.

Trump email hypocrisy

Emails! Emails! Emails! This was a constant refrain during the 2016 election cycle. Republicans made sure voters knew about Hillary Clinton’s private email scandal and Donald Trump even made it one of his main focuses in his campaign, labeling his opponent “Crooked Hillary”. This makes the actions of Ivanka Trump, the president’s daughter as well as a part of Trump’s Cabinet as Special Advisor, all the more hypocritical.

All federal employees must abide by certain ethics, standards, and rules. This includes following guidelines that are set in place to protect classified information from getting into the wrong hands. Ivanka Trump was found to have breached this as White House officials learned that for most of 2017, she sent hundreds of emails that discussed private White House business using a private email.

The spokesman for Ivanka Trump’s Lawyer, Peter Mirijanian, said in a statement that Trump only used her private email sporadically and before she was briefed on the rules. He also said that no classified information was sent.

However, this does not excuse what she did. You would think that since her father's main attack against Hilary Clinton was for using a personal email account as secretary of state she, of all people, would know how wrong it is.

She and her lawyers are claiming that she didn't know that it was a violation of federal guidelines but I refuse to believe that she is that ignorant. Clearly, everyone joining the Trump administration should have been on high alert about personal email use.

Ivanka Trump's actions are inexcusable and she should know better.

A summer to remember: High School Democrats of America Summit

Most teens envision their perfect summer filled with activities like long walks along the beach, trips across the country or perhaps even across oceans to places such as Disneyworld or Universal Studios. However, as a student deeply intrigued and fascinated by politics, I found my own Magic Kingdom right in the nation's capital.

I stepped out of my car and into the humid D.C. air on June 26th carrying a packed duffel bag. I stared above at the flags that read "Thurston Hall" and were embellished with the George Washington University logo. This was going to be my home for the next four days. This was the start of the High School Democrats of America Summit.

A few months prior, I had come across a Facebook page that my friend had recommended. The page was for the National High School Democrats of America (HSDA) and they were promoting their application for students to spend a few days in Washington D.C to further explore both politics and the values of the Democratic Party. I was immediately interested and proceeded to apply. A few weeks later, I received an email confirming my acceptance.

Upon my arrival, I was led into GWU's Thurston Hall dormitories. I began to branch out and tried to make new friends. I learned that students had traveled from all across the country.

I was amazed by how politically aware everybody was and how enthusiastic they were about spreading the liberal message. The people I met, even though most considered themselves Democrats, were spread on a wide range of political ideologies. Some were hardcore Bernie Sanders supporters that backed socialist ideals, others were Hillary Clinton followers, and some were more on the conservative side.

After settling into our rooms and doing numerous icebreaker activities, all 96 students were broken up into groups of nine or ten with one adult mentor and we were off for a tour of the National Mall to conclude our Sunday night.

The following day, most of us woke up at 6:00 A.M. to join in on the Pro-Choice rally outside the Supreme Court. This was my very first rally, and I'm was so glad it was for an issue that held incredible significance to me as a woman.

Throughout the rest of the day, we listened to speeches and seminars given by organizations such as NARAL Pro-Choice America, Communications Workers of America, Generation Progress Action, and the Human Rights Campaign. These sessions were phenomenal, and I had never felt so motivated about politics before.

Later that evening, we took a tour of the Democratic National Committee's headquarters. We walked past dozens of pictures of President Obama and his administration, along with posters with the signatures of Martin O'Malley, Bernie Sanders, and Hillary Clinton. We got to see the working environment of the DNC and how each department worked.

However, my favorite part of the tour was getting to see (and TOUCH) one of the filing cabinets of the historic Watergate break in. This made my high school journalist self jump with joy.

Tuesday was equally as hectic, as half of the group was scheduled for a White House tour while the other half had a Senate Gallery tour. Being able to tour the White House was such a memorable event, from the hour long security check to the walk through the Blue, Red and Green Rooms.

The day concluded with another tour of the Capitol Building, panels from the DSCC, Students for Hillary, young elected leaders at George Washington University's Elliott School of International Affairs.

Wednesday marked the last day of the summit and we began the day with another speech from the DCCC and from the amazing presidential candidate Martin O'Malley himself.

O'Malley's visit had previously not been on the scheduled agenda, so everyone was buzzing with excitement and all wanted to meet him. O'Malley gave a very inspirational speech about the importance of young adults being engaged in politics and changing the world. His speech also gave a wonderful conclusion of the summit and why we were all there in the first place.

The four incredible days had come to an end. Throughout the duration of the summit, I had met so many inspiring people with such strong standings and unique stories. I was truly amazed about the work that some of my peers were doing such as

creating their very own political campaigns, working as Senate Pages, and going from door to door knocking and gaining the support of their locals.

I can't wait to return next year, and see how much the organization has grown, to divulge further about the Democratic Party, and how the hard work of students can impact the world. The friendships I made and the memories that were shared among us were definitely better than any vacation could supply.

The U.S. needs a female president

As the 2016 presidential race approaches, politicians are starting to place their bids in the hopes of being elected the 46th president of the United States.

Just in the last few weeks, we have seen several contenders enter the race. For the Republican party, there are currently three men competing to be on the ticket: Texas Senator Ted Cruz, Kentucky Senator Rand Paul and Florida Senator Marco Rubio.

As for the Democrats, there appears to be one candidate who has caught everyone's eye. She's been the first lady of Arkansas, the first lady of the U.S., a Senator from New York and most recently we knew her as the Secretary of State. You guessed it – the Democratic party favorite is Hillary Clinton.

Looking at the polls, the percentage of Democrats who support Clinton is overwhelming. The Huffington Post reports that 60 percent of Democrats favor Clinton over any other candidate. Vice President Joe Biden and Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth

Warren are tied for second place with a measly 12 percent each.

This means that there is not going to be much competition between Democratic contenders. The Democratic party will choose nominees to officially support for President and Vice President at the 2016 Democratic National Convention in July of next year.

That means that Clinton has over a year to campaign for a nomination she's already almost certain to win.

In my opinion, the extensive campaigning of today's politicians has gotten out of hand. The presidential election of 2008 was held between two new contenders without an incumbent president in the competition, which is similar to the political climate of the 2016 election.

According to the Federal Election Commission, in the 2008 presidential race, John McCain received \$84.1 million in public funds for his campaign. Barack Obama received \$745.7 million private funds after being the first major party nominee in history who declined to accept public funds.

I find it ridiculous that millions of the nation's money goes into supporting the self-glorifying campaigns of two individuals. Couldn't this money be better spent elsewhere?

It's my sincere hope that Hillary Clinton will follow in President Obama's footsteps and refuse to accept public funds for her campaign. That way, people will be able to use their money for a useful purpose, such as getting an education, which is something I consider to be an investment in our nation's economy. It appears that Clinton doesn't really need the money for her campaign, since she is the clear leader in the Democratic party.

So while it looks to be inevitable that Clinton will be the Democratic candidate in 2016, can she actually win the

election and be remembered throughout history as the first female president?

According to a Gallup poll from March, 89 percent of Americans know enough about Clinton to have an opinion of her and 50 percent of the people polled had a positive opinion of her. Comparing that to the 39 percent who did not favor Clinton, I'd say that prospects are looking good for Clinton.

However, we are still a year and a half away from Election Day. That means Clinton and other hopeful candidates will be spending virtually every day for the next 18 months strategizing, flying around the country and making speeches all to ensure that they have your vote on that one fateful November day.

I will be voting for the first time in a presidential election on that day. Although I firmly believe that the time for America to have a female president is long overdue, I do not intend to vote blindly for any candidate.

Hillary Clinton must take some important steps before I can feel certain that she deserves my vote. First of all, she needs to choose an acceptable running mate – a Vice President who easily connects with voters and someone who balances Clinton's political seniority with fresh ideas and an optimistic attitude.

As excited as I am to cast my vote, there are still months to go on the election campaign timeline. Hillary might be my top choice for the moment, but that could all change at the drop of a press release. Either way, I hope to see the U.S. led by a female commander-in-chief in my lifetime.

Do students really care?

It's that time again. Time for the American people to take charge and take a stand, or take whatever is put in front of them.

Half of the populace chooses the latter. This election is one of many around the globe that have or will take place this year that will decide the fate of this planet, and more importantly, gauge the character of the societies that live here.

According to the United States Election Project, only 57 percent of the voting-age population voted in the 2008 presidential election.

The young 18-29 demographic, which is approximately one-fifth of the voting population, is similar to the national average: 52 percent came out to vote last election as reported by The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE).

"If [young people] don't vote, then their perspective will be lost," former government worker and social studies teacher Mary Ann Richardson said. "They have a lot to learn about our government and there is a large amount of apathy."

The numbers are changing, however. Fifty-eight percent of young people are reported by Gallup to "definitely vote" this year and according to the Harvard Institute of Politics, 55 percent of young voters would choose Obama over Romney with 9 percent undecided. These numbers are similar to an A-Blast survey. 82 percent of students who are eligible to vote are planning to vote. The political climate of AHS is overwhelmingly liberal. Seventy percent of students polled would vote to reelect President Obama, while only sixteen percent would choose Romney.

The amount of students who identify politically as independent or "other" is 30 percent.

"Even if more people are voting, few are actually informed to a developed degree. [Most young voters] didn't understand the issues back in 2008 and many probably don't now," Richardson said. Richardson recalls the many students donning pro-Obama attire spilling out of her room four years ago when she held Young Democrats meetings. Students cared most about being able to go to college and find a job. Now after four years of little change, they are still in the same place and the enthusiasm has dampened.

The A-Blast survey reports that 13% of the student body are both "extremely" informed and "not at all" informed about politics. There are a larger of percentage of students who believe they are adequately informed than somewhat however.

"You have considerable amount of people who can vote and sometimes vote misinformed, or they have the idea that their vote doesn't matter, and they don't care," senior Gabe Kuhl said. "I think a large part of it is a lack of education and a desire to be educated."

Some young people are jaded by what they believe is a failing system and choose not to vote. From lying leaders who have one hand on a sensationalist speech and one shaking the hand of a lobbyist to voter ID laws and loud, negative debates, our political system is not very attractive.

"Politicians are prone to say they'll go down with their ship when it's afloat, but sing a different song when they boat begins to sink," Kuhl said.

Regardless of systematic corruption, it is possible for people to evolve from it, instead of living with it and not caring.

"There's always a choice. Unfortunately, there is something embedded within our society that promotes our political system

and apathy. Reform goes against the fabric of our culture. It is inherently a human issue," Richardson said.

Young people are the people that can change this. They are highly susceptible to new ideas, which can be both a hindrance and catalyst for growth.

"We don't have a check-in, check-out democracy. We need to be engaged in our world. The kids in 1971 cared, and knew what they were doing." The 26th amendment, which lowered the voting age to 18, was passed in 1971. "They knew that there was injustice in drafting men to go to war when they couldn't even vote, and they did something about it," Richardson said.

"To make people interested in something, you need to connect with them—hit them square in the face," Kuhl said. Kuhl elaborates that unfortunately, the most successful form of political misinformation are television advertisements, which reach much of the American populace.

"I haven't been very interested in politics in the past, but I've been watching the debates and plan to learn more by visiting websites and reading more about the candidates' desires," senior Meghan Lynn said. "I feel that I can't make a decision until I am well-informed."

More young voters are branching away from infotainment, and returning to traditional methods of finding the truth, too often mired in mud.

"There is no substitute for reading books and studying articles," Richardson said. "It is necessary to follow politics on a daily basis. We need to know what's going on."

A supposedly democratic republic cannot function without participation. A world that one wishes to live in cannot exist without pursuits to create it.

"Not voting just reinforces the assumption that we don't

care," Kuhl said.

Voting is not limited to the two candidates promoted by the media. Valid votes can be sent in for an independent party or written in.

"Some people vote simply because of party, or other labels," Kuhl said. "I would vote Democrat, not because I identify with being a Democrat, but because I agree with a candidate's platform."

The question young people have to ask themselves is if they want to maintain the status quo, or if they will be trailblazers and aware citizens of a new world, so that they can leave behind problems, and live out the solutions.

Shutting us out from our own politics

As an AHS student, you are probably aware of the unique situation in which you have been placed. Not only do you contribute to one of the most culturally diverse high schools in the country, but you also are a part of one of the most economically diverse. While it is evident that AHS and FCPS, at-large, respect the existence of such a demographic, the American political process does not.

This is because, for all of you, it will be likely that any interest you might have in serving this country in an elected office will be pulverized by the sheer amount of money you will have to contribute to a campaign.

More money has been used to fund advertisements and influence

voters than ever before. The Washington Post reports that in the presidential election alone, almost \$1.5 billion has been pumped into this election season.

This ridiculously high amount of money spent is largely the result of *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (2010), a U.S. Supreme Court Case that permitted corporations and other independent donors to contribute large sums of money to independent political action committees (or PACs). The resulting new PACs, or “super PACs,” cannot communicate directly with political campaigns, but can use the money as they wish in elections all around the nation.

Since 1886, in which the Supreme Court first applied the 14th Amendment to corporations, the First Amendment has been expanded to protect the collective rights of companies and large groups of individuals. It was on this premise that the Supreme Court decided the *Citizens United* case, claiming that the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 (BCRA) violated the First Amendment. Effectively, the BCRA prohibited any entities not associated with official political campaigns from advertising 60 days before a general election.

This is particularly important for students to understand. “Knowing about these rules and cases allow young voters to be informed about where certain campaign ads are coming from and what information to trust,” government teacher Kellie Burke said. “There are limits to what the candidates and their campaigns can do, but there are a lot of independent groups that have separately formed to get around these laws and limits. You need to be educated about what exactly these groups are.”

Fact checking has become particularly imperative to the legitimacy of this election season’s campaigns. Unfortunately, super PACs contribute to the misinformation that has already become ubiquitous in today’s political environment, as they are not beholden to the concerns or direction of political

candidates. With the proliferating use of social media and the Internet in this election, it is harder for Americans of any age, young people included, to discern fact from fiction. In fact, a large portion of money used by super PACs and campaigns alike are focused about technology. "Technology has done some great things for elections by allowing us to watch candidates debate on television and reach out to voters more directly through the Internet," Burke said. "The downside is that technology gets expensive. Television ads are not cheap and neither is running a website. Now campaigns have to hire social media "experts" to run Twitter accounts, Facebook pages, and make YouTube videos."

History has demonstrated that most candidates for the presidency have been wealthy Americans. However, this was never a de facto requisite, especially for political offices of state and local levels. Now, more than ever, you have to be well-off if you are serious about running for any elected office. "It is unfortunate that in order to run for president these days you need a good amount of personal wealth to kick off your campaign," Burke said. "It limits who can run for office and I think it limits the type of backgrounds candidates have. You see a lot of lawyers and businessmen running, like Obama and Romney, and not many other professions."

It is for this reason that campaign finance reform has been an important issue for many political advocacy organizations as of late. Some organizations, such as the Americans Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), wish to make campaigns publically financed, by allotting candidates with a certain amount of dollars.

Many Americans have yet to fully grasp the extent to which moneyed individuals or corporations contribute to political pursuits. This is one reason for why so many Americans were outraged over the donation trends of Chick-Fil-A this past summer, for example. Chick-Fil-A is not alone in contributing

to political efforts. Many corporations with whom many high school students exchange sales contribute portions of their dollars to political groups and PACs alike.

In the end, it is the voter who benefits least from this system. Politicians, intrinsically, are most likely to ascribe to the wishes of those who contributed most to their campaigns. Under the provisions of cases with the likes of Citizens United, this prohibits the average voter, with less contributing power, from having as profound an impact as that of companies.

But most importantly, we must remain cognizant there there is no test, besides that of citizenship, required to lead this nation. Ultimately, Supreme Court cases such as Citizens United not only contribute to the rising dismissal of that guarantee, but also prevent students such as us from having a meaningful impact on our political process.

Relax, it's just a sandwich

During this past summer, I noticed something that completely shocked me. The people of this country care too much about the stupid little things and not enough about what matters most. Many of these unfortunate occasions have only intensified intolerance to others' ideas. When a person spends so much time "shouting" their opinions on Facebook or in person, they shut down opportunities for conversation that might actually find some compromise or conclusion.

In late July, I received invitation after invitation on Facebook about joining events or groups to support or ban Chick-Fil-A. It all began when Chick-Fil-A owner, Dan Cathy, was asked by a reporter in an interview his beliefs on gay

marriage. He told the reporter that he did not support gay marriage.

After Dan Cathy said that, the country went nuts. People everywhere were either completely against him or completely for him.

When asked about the subject, I said I was for neither side. The whole thing felt ridiculous. I thought that way too much time and energy was spent on this topic, when there are so many other problems in the world like hunger, poverty, joblessness, that these people could give their time and money to help.

During this insane hullabaloo, I read an editorial in the Washington Post by Alexandra Petri. Her main slogan for her article was "judge the sandwich by the sandwich." She was trying to show people that if they were so nit picky about what they consumed or bought, and only chose stuff that was created by people with the same views, then we would live the dullest lives ever.

The amount of time wasted doing research about every single product we eat, wear, read, or use, and then trying to convince other people to do the same, would be a massive waste of time.

Here's an example: In some Middle Eastern countries, from where the United States imports its oil, there are laws forbidding homosexuality, where breaking those laws frequently results in execution. So here's a question for you: When you drive up to the local gas station, do you ask the service station attendant where the gasoline was imported from? And if he tells you the country and you learn it is one that kills homosexuals, do you drive away? Or just fill up your car?

Is it okay to support gay marriage or not to support it? Yes, of course it is. But should you shut down any opportunity for conversation about it, not listening to what other people have

to say? This could go for any topic: healthcare, abortion, religion, or even taxes. On both sides of many issues, people are too angry about what they believe and don't even bother to listen to what others have to say.

Around the same time of this Chick-Fil-A madness, James Homes killed 12 and wounded 58 during The Dark Knight Rises premier. A family friend of ours had a sister who was shot. She, amazingly, survived what her doctors thought was a fatal wound. I was part of a Facebook group that raised money to help pay for her medical expenses. Even then, the Chick-Fil-A arguments continued, with more posts and comments than the Aurora shootings received.

It is absurd that this summer, people cared more about a chicken sandwich than for people who lost loved ones or now have physical or psychological injuries to live with for the rest of their lives because of the random violent act of one person.

I understand that many of you will never eat a Chick-Fil-A sandwich again, because you disagree with Mr. Cathy. That is your right. But let's keep the dialog civil and set an example for the world that we can disagree, but not hate each other because we disagree. Let's be grateful for the things we can agree on, and continue talking about the others.

It's just a sandwich.

Many factors affect identity

We are a school of immigrants, athletes and artists. We are journalists and activists. Some of us embody all of these qualities. Others do not. Even more embody only some. But

these appellations do not wholly describe who we are. They simply describe part of our identities.

The theme of this page was inspired by a meeting I attended over the summer. It was a conference between young Israeli and Palestinian leaders at the International Meridian House. The subject of the day was the American concept of the separation of church and state.

However, they were not as interested in the nuances of America's relationship between religion and politics as they were in how we, as a population, define ourselves.

"How is it that most citizens of the United States call themselves 'Americans' first and then use any adjectives afterwards?" one attendee said.

It was an interesting question, and subsequently evoked some interesting responses. Identity is such a pervasive force, yet rarely appreciated simply because it is different for each person and defined in a number of different manners throughout academia. At a school as diverse as AHS, our identities undoubtedly influence the way we act. Thus, I do not plan on attempting to find an answer to the attendee's question. Instead, I thought it would be intriguing to elucidate some of the many factors that have caused us to dress as we dress, speak as we speak, and interact as we do, for example, with our peers throughout AHS.

According to University of Georgia politics professor Sherry Lowrance, identity is a "complex, evolving, multi-layered, and situational relationship between an individual and a group or a number of groups." If this is true, then AHS is the perfect venue in which to study identity.

FCPS reports that AHS has one of the county's most mobile populations. Of the 2,758 students enrolled in AHS at the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year, 492 had moved, transferred or otherwise left by the end of the school year.

As such a transient community, AHS certainly hosts a plethora of identities.

Scholars of social identity theory agree that there are two fields of study within identity—social and personal identity. Social identity, or collective identity, describes the way that a group defines itself, whereas personal identity describes the way that an individual describes himself or herself.

There are a variety of factors that form these distinct identities. Family, education, background and culture are among them.

“My family has had a large influence on me. Culturally, I am a Muslim and from Uzbekistan. My family always tries to remember who we are. We always try to uphold our culture at home. For example, we practice certain customs and speak Russian in order to conserve our culture.” senior Ulugbek Israilov said.

For many students at AHS such as Israilov, culture is an important component of identity.

Identity is also a changing perception. As one’s opinion of his or her religion (or lack thereof), family and upbringing change, so too can one’s description of his or her identity.

“My family applies a loose interpretation of our religion. We are always welcome to learning new things, and open to new ideas,” Israilov said.

Ultimately, in a school as diverse as AHS, the development of our identity only helps to add to the variety of perspectives that grace the school’s classroom discussions and projects. With so many different backgrounds, traditions and opinions pervading our environment, each student’s self-described identity is easily subjected to change.

“Most importantly, my actions create the person who I am

today. Not how I define myself," Israilov said.