

Ashwin Aravind, Second Place Winner in the Pacific Region
Irvington High School (public); Fremont, CA; Teacher: Cheryl Cook-Kallio

Unfair taxes, general warrants, and restricted press were hallmarks of an English monarchy that rested on the "rule of man" to create policies for the colonies; however, because an individual's discretion could not represent those of thousands, our Founders utilized the civic value of Rule of Law to establish a nation with a government that promoted the common good of its people.

The Founders knew that adherence to rule of law was paramount to the protection of the people; recognizing from their experiences under an abusive absolute monarchy, they drafted the Constitution, which prevented the accumulation of power by officials in government. Borrowing the "separated powers" doctrine of philosopher Montesquieu, the Framers divided the functions of government between the legislative, executive, and judicial branches; this division ensured that no branch could be autonomous of the other two, allowing a strong individual or faction to accumulate enough power to endanger citizens' rights and national stability. The Framers further diluted centralized government by establishing the system of federalism whereby the state and national governments retained specific powers that could not be infringed upon by the others. The Constitution laid down government principles that prevented the rise of an individual or party who would subvert the rule of law to propagate a personal agenda at the people's expense; through adhering to rule of law, our government works not in its officials' interests but in our interests.

Our first president, George Washington, exemplified the American adherence to rule of law during his administration when he firmly exercised his presidential authority without becoming dictatorial. During the Whiskey Rebellion of 1794, Washington used his authority under the Militia Act of 1792 to raise a temporary national army, composed of state militias, to quell this threat; in doing so, he challenged states' authority by taking their Second Amendment-guaranteed militias to create a national army. However, by returning the militias after the crisis, he demonstrated that he would not be abusing the authority vested in him by adhering strictly to rule of law; this strengthened Americans' faith in the power of the rule of law. However, in 1796, Federalist Party activists pushed to install Washington as America's Monarch. With his immense popularity and efficient style of governing, Washington could have easily been crowned, much as Napoleon did a decade later. However, he recognized that by becoming king, he would not only be breaking his adherence to the rule of law but he would also be weakening American faith in adhering to the rule of law. Thus, citizens would become disillusioned in our government, and our nation's stability would be threatened. Thus, by stepping down after two terms, Washington demonstrated that adherence to the rule of law was the most important civic value because it ensured the stability of the nation, thus promoting the common good.

Though I am under 18 years of age, I strictly adhere to our rule of law by doing my duty as a citizen to voice my opinion of the government to prevent it from becoming abusive. Through my participation in phone banking and walking precincts, I can promote individuals who I feel best represent my ideals of good government; their election removes those who I believe are not working towards our interests and provides these new representatives with the ability to work for the common good of America. Additionally, through the use of blogs and editorials in local newspapers, I can inform my community about where, I feel, the government is lacking in terms of remaining under the umbrella of higher law; through this discourse, I also become a more informed citizen who is ready to participate actively once I come of age. Through my voice, I can adhere to American rule of law by utilizing my "citizen's check" upon the government to keep it focused upon American interests.

Rule of law has worked successfully in America for more than 200 years; while European monarchies fell into turmoil after the fall of their monarchs, America thrived because rule of law prevented our government from becoming abusive and inciting the people from becoming anarchic. As a result of our success, many countries have adopted our model of the rule of law by drafting constitutions that preclude tyranny from accumulated power in the government. Thus, America's adherence to rule of law is the strongest of our civic values because it government from becoming abusive and focuses it on making America "a more perfect union."