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"The great question (is)...not whether there be power in the world, nor whence it came, but who should have it," John Locke observed. Our nation was founded on the principle of power to the people. Self-government has been crucial to our political system from the 1600s to modern times, and it is the very value that defines us as a nation. Though time changes many things, the wisdom of self-governance has remained the cornerstone of our country. Centuries after some of the great political thinkers, Ronald Reagan echoed the philosophy of many of them when he asserted, "This is the issue...whether we believe in our capacity for self-government, or whether we abandon the American Revolution and confess that a little intellectual elite in a far-distant capital can plan our lives for us better than we can plan them ourselves."

The idea of self-government certainly precedes our secession from Britain in 1776, but our Declaration of Independence sums it up perfectly. Americans "...are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights...that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." Let's look again – endowed by their Creator, not endowed by their government. This is very important because if the government granted us these rights, they can take them away. Then it's no longer self-government, it's despotism. Providentially, there have been true heroes all throughout our nation's history who have refreshed our monumental passion for the doctrine of self-government.

Our third President and author of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, truly personified the concept of self-governance. Jefferson not only wrote such inspirational words but actually lived them, as he showed to us in his staunch defense of the farmers involved in Shay's Rebellion. The farmers had to have seen Jefferson, a diplomat, as an enemy, but because Jefferson fiercely believed in self-government, he lobbied that the farmers should not be prosecuted for their notorious assault on a federal armory. Furthermore, Jefferson inherited a high social standing from his mother and wealth from his rich father. Because of his class and money, he would have held a position of power and influence even if the American Revolution had never taken place. Yet he dedicated his life to ensuring these rights to the ordinary citizen. He famously proclaimed, "Leave no authority not responsible to the people."

It would be hypocritical of me to merely spout my political passions after strongly admiring Jefferson's resolve. So what can I do to show to the world that I want to practice what I preach? Obviously, I can start voting when I turn eighteen. I've heard far too many people who never vote complaining about the government that they're too disinterested to change. I've been very vocal to my friends and family that voting tops the list of responsibilities of a good citizen. Additionally, I can continue to write to my Congressmen, ensuring that my voice is heard even though I'm a minor. I was pleasantly surprised last year when I wrote to my local legislators and they responded, despite my age. Moreover, I can attend more political rallies to fight for the causes close to my heart. I should inform myself with the daily news to hold our politicians accountable to what they were elected to do. And, when I'm old enough, there is no reason that I couldn't consider running for public office. The opportunities are endless, because our political system was designed to make it easy for us to hold the reins of government. As Amos R. E. Pinochet once said, "Today the nations of the world may be divided into two classes – the nations in which the government fears the people, and the nations in which the people fear the government." We are fortunate enough to live in a society where the government answers to us – at least for now. To keep it that way, we need – I need – to stop being too lazy to take action.

As Americans, we have many differences of opinion – Republican or Democrat, pro-life or pro-choice, supporter of small government or big government. However, our mighty nation has sustained well over two hundred years of varying viewpoints. Again tapping into Jefferson's wisdom, "Every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle." So despite all that we disagree on, there is one thread that holds us all together under the name "America." And that thread is the principle of self-government.