Delta County Democratic Scholarship Application for 2017-2018

Name: Isaac Van Horn

School: Hotchkiss High School

1. Describe your involvement in school and the community during the past four years.

While in high school I participated in Track, Tennis, the Speech and Debate team, National Honor Society, Band and FFA. As a member of the National Honor Society I have done community service projects such as road side cleanups, senior center lunches, and yard work for senior community members, and helped at the local animal shelter. Our school band participates in community parades and does holiday concerts at the senior center. I have helped with various FFA fundraisers and a community "labor auction". Our community recently applied for and received a 1.7 million dollar GOCO grant to increase outdoor education for young people. I was a member of the student group at our high school, the Youth Outdoor Network, which helped with this grant process. I spoke in support of the grant at our town council and to the GOCO evaluation committee. I helped conduct a community survey related to the grant. I volunteered with local groups and agencies on projects such as tamarisk removal and riparian habitat repair. I have also been a part of Kids Pasta Project, which created and served fundraising dinners for local community causes.

2. Briefly describe someone who has made a significant impact on your education and why they were influential.

When I think about who has made a significant impact in my education, it really comes down to a combination of two teachers. Throughout school, and middle school especially, math has been a subject I have struggled with. My middle school math teacher was also a coach and taught in a way that simply made the subject difficult for me. That all changed, however, when I entered high school. Both my high school math teachers, Richard Hypio and Eric Hollembeak, have changed my view of math. Their open approach to teaching, endless patience, and ability to demonstrate several different methods to achieve each result have made math class something I look forward to instead of dreading. I intend to major in engineering in college.

3. Describe your performance in school in terms of grade point average or accomplishments.

While in high school, I have been on the Honor Roll for all semester and achieved academic letters each year. I was inducted into the National Honor Society in my sophomore year and continue to be a member. At the end of last semester, I was ranked 4th in my class, with a 4.0 gpa. I've earned varsity letters for my participation in Tennis (2 years), Speech and Debate (3 years), and Band (4 years). I have been awarded Degree of Excellence by the National Speech and Debate Association.

4. What are your plans after you leave high school?

My career goal is to be at the cutting edge of technology. I want to help create technology that improves humanity's quality of life worldwide. I want to be 'on the frontline', working to push the limits of what is possible. In order to achieve my goals, I have chosen to major in computer engineering. Unlike computer science or electrical engineering, this field is a hybrid. It is a blend of the physical and virtual, the hardware and software aspects of computer technology.   For as long as I can remember, I have enjoyed figuring out how things work, and fixing broken things. As I've grown older, that has developed into a love of anything electronic. I would like to be one of the people that creates the things that we can only dream about now.

What are the ramifications to our country when citizens do not vote or when citizens who do vote are not informed?

There are many possible consequences of people not voting and uninformed people voting. When they are combined, however, I think the most prominent issues is the polarization it causes. It results in extremist views receiving more representation at the polls, while the lack of informed voters means the more acceptable middle ground is underrepresented.

Let's start with why people don't vote. Most people don't vote either because they don't like any of the candidates, or they feel like their vote won't matter. This means that for any given election there will be a set of political views that are alienated. This causes a specific demographic to be underrepresented while other demographics will get more representation the less they have in common with the alienated views.

Now let's face the facts. The most prolific news about a campaign is the news that goes viral, and if it goes viral then it's probably pretty extreme. This helps create extreme views and means that ordinary information about the campaign doesn't penetrate. This type of information helps motivate voters with extreme viewpoints and they become more highly motivated to try and influence the election. This leads to a high turnout of people voting for extreme policies or candidates. If the more informed middle ground has a low turnout because they are turned off by the extremism, then the votes by political view begin to look sort of like an inverted bell curve with increased extremist views on either side.

The most recent presidential election is a perfect example. Many voters who were keeping up with the election chose not to vote because they disagreed with viewpoints on both sides. This made the ability to communicate to less informed voters very important. Despite Clinton's much more reasoned platform, Trump surpassed her by becoming a viral sensation that reached voters with extreme viewpoints.

When there is a combination of people not voting, and uninformed people who do vote, our political system becomes polarized. A tug of war develops between the extremes of one side and the extremes of the other side and the effect is paralysis in the political system. It is very difficult to move forward when, in order to do so, we have to bridge the gap of an inverted bell curve. In short, the ramifications to our country when people either do not vote, or vote based only on viral, sensationalist information is a paralysis of the normal system of compromise and the empowerment of extremist political positions.