



# NATIONAL STUDENT/PARENT MOCK ELECTION

## **The Democracy Forum**

The Democracy Forum is Tucson's and the nation's response to the hate and vitriol that lead to the vandalism and threats of violence Tucson and the nation have just experienced on the issues of health care and immigration.

The program is designed to bring parents, grandparents, children and public officials together in a bipartisan intergenerational multi-ethnic forum on the key national issues of our time, and to do it in an atmosphere of decency, civility and generosity to our fellow Americans.

While we were putting the finishing touches on Tucson's Democracy Forum, we saw the St. Louis Post-Dispatch story reporting hate crimes on college campuses:

- Cotton balls scattered outside the black cultural center at University of Missouri-Columbia.
- Racial slurs and a threat of lynching at St. Louis University.
- A swastika scrawled on a bathroom wall near a Jewish studies center at the University of Miami.
- Death threats against black students left on a bathroom wall at Hocking College in Nelsonville, Ohio.
- An uproar sparked by a white fraternity at the University of California – San Diego, when is sponsored a ghetto-themed "Compton Cookout" to mock Black History Month.

There are those who see a correlation between the rise in campus hate crimes and the increasingly vitriolic exchanges taking place among our

nation's politicians and leaders – on both sides of the political aisle.

The nation's first black presidency is seen as providing "kindling for the fire" the St. Louis newspaper reported.

Tucson's Democracy Forum is as an urgently needed answer to what is happening in America now, an initiative that can lead the way for parents and teachers to pass to the next generation the torch of democracy – still burning brightly with the values for which the founding fathers fought.

The Democracy Forum is designed to stir emotions. Americans of all ages and a wide diversity of beliefs will be inspired to rededicate themselves to America's ideals, just as did our highly successful Declaration of Independence visit. They will model for a new generation of Americans the values and ideals of the Founding Fathers as free men and women, speaking freely on the issues of their own time but with courtesy and concern for their fellow Americans and for generations to come.

Youth voice will play a very important role as Young Americans help to lead the way, playing an active part in designing and organizing a program for their families and friends.

We hope foundations, too, will join in these efforts just as we believe schools and communities will combine with us through the National Student/Parent Mock Election network.

As Sandra Day O'Connor, retired Justice of the Supreme Court, said in her Declaration of Independence remarks, "There is no greater legacy any of us can leave than the legacy of democracy."

The effective strategies that made the Declaration of Independence visit so moving and successful – the music, drama, costumes, decorations, ritual and pageantry, as well as oratory - all with carefully programmed timing will play a key role in the forums. Pomp and circumstance will hold the crowds' attention, moving their emotions and preparing Americans of all ages to be receptive to the message.

### **Why Pilots in Tucson and Guaynabo? Pilot forums are being designed for Tucson and Guaynabo, Puerto Rico, because ...**

Tucson has just had a hugely successful and emotionally moving visit of a rare original copy of the Declaration of Independence for which 5,460 parents and children turned out. Over 1000 children signed up to vote in the National Student/Parent Mock Election where votes are cast on issues as well as candidates. On average, one child tried a new electronic voting machine every 6 minutes. Every TV channel in the city covered the event.

Immediately following this success, the office of Gabrielle Giffords, the Congresswoman who led the way in the Declaration of Independence visits, was vandalized, a black congressman who led the civil rights march was again exposed to racial slurs and epithets, a senator received repeated death threats, and then both a Congressman and his staff in Tucson were threatened with death. Our children saw a model of hatred, vitriol and violence repeated endlessly on TV and on the Internet.

We wish to involve Tucson in thoughtful, meaningful discussion of the issues now facing our country, led by the members of Congress elected to govern us, but welcoming participation by their opponents as well and by every member of the audience of any age.

In Puerto Rico, 410,000 votes were cast in the National Student/Parent Mock Election, the largest number of participants in any state or territory. All National Student/Parent Mock Election materials were translated into Spanish. The Instituto de Formacion Democratica (IFD), which has led the Puerto Rico project for 20 years, seeks to help the national project expand the participation nationwide. The national project also seeks to expand the participation of Hispanic students, parents and public officials nationwide.

### **Our Goal**

To recruit partners to help us change the tone of the national dialogue so that expletives, racial slurs, and violence will be shunned by the citizens of our democracy.

To expand the participation of all ethnic and racial groups in the National Student/Parent Mock Election and in the thoughtful discussion of the issues that will shape our country in the coming years.

To involve public officials in the pilots along with their constituents, and thereby bring to the attention of Washington, D.C. decision makers who appropriate funds for education the importance of an educated, informed electorate to our democracy.

To change the perspective of the nation's appropriators so that we do not educate a generation of Americans prepared to succeed in business but not prepared to participate in our democracy.

### **How**

By utilizing the resources of as many partners as possible and the resources of the members of Congress and their staffs in each congressional district, we plan to develop the strategies and refine a model of kind and courteous discussions among all generations and groups. We seek to expand participation, and learn from our experiences so that the model we will later pass on to every state will be effective and productive. We will set a

standard for how the citizens of a free country resolve disputes with "liberty and justice for all."

By using strategies that reach the affective domain (feelings and emotions) as well as the cognitive, we will change attitudes and behaviors.

### **Organization**

The National Student/Parent Mock Election is a non-partisan 501c3 non-profit with a 30-year track record. It involves a wide diversity of partners who contribute toward an exciting and highly motivating event, taking full advantage of the rituals of our democracy and an atmosphere of community concern and involvement to pass the torch to a new generation, helping them to become full fledged members of their democracy whose opinions matter to young and old alike.

The National Student/Parent Mock Election seeks to empower two generations at once to take charge of their destiny and their nation's.

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