

GABBY GIFFORDS WON'T BACK DOWN



BRIARCLIFF ENTERTAINMENT AND CNN FILMS PRESENT IN ASSOCIATION WITH TIME STUDIOS A STORYVILLE FILMS AND LISA ERSPAMER ENTERTAINMENT PRODUCTION "GABBY GIFFORDS WON'T BACK DOWN"
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JOURNEYS IN FILM
educating for global understanding

Civic Engagement



DRIVING QUESTION

How can civics and public service inform one's sense of belonging in a community?

Gabby's political journey began after she returned home from a consulting job in New York City to save her family's tire business. She was tired of the negative press about her home state and decided that, with her degree in planning and her business acumen, she could help. Later, while serving in Congress as a pro-business moderate Democrat, Gabby was praised for her ability to work across the aisle and build consensus.

The injuries sustained from a 2011 assassination attempt forced her to retire early, but she continued working to support her community (locally and nationally) when she founded the gun safety organization today known as Giffords to end the gun violence epidemic in the U.S. After facing gridlock at the federal level, Giffords began focusing on state legislation and, to date, has passed more than 450 pieces of legislation promoting gun safety in states across the country.

This summer, the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act was signed into law, the first piece of federal gun safety legislation in nearly 30 years.



Useful Terms

Civics is the study of the rights and responsibilities of citizens and community members.

Civic engagement refers to understanding and supporting the rights and responsibilities of citizens and community members. An engaged citizenry will advocate, vote, volunteer, and participate in local politics to strengthen their community. The range of engagement is vast, from voting in local elections to starting a nonprofit organization.

Public servants work in jobs that provide needed resources to a community, funded by government agencies, which may be local, state, or federal. Individuals working for utility companies, emergency services, education, librarians, and local politicians are notable examples.

Personal Reflection

1. How would you describe the political climate in your town? What are current topics of discussion?
2. How often do you talk about politics with others? Is your focus on convincing the other side of your position? Or do you focus on listening and trying to understand the perspective(s) of others?
3. Do you find yourself unmotivated to use your civic voice? Or in an echo chamber of inaction and complaint? Are you motivated to shift the energy?

Discussion Questions

1. How did Gabby Giffords enter politics? What was her career trajectory? Where did some say she was headed?
2. Independent of a political party, what skills do you think an effective politician should have?
3. After being severely injured, Gabby retired from Congress as she felt she could not fully serve her constituency. She then started Giffords to enact change through policy and law. Compare and contrast the difference in efficacy and reach when Gabby was an elected official compared to her nonprofit work.
4. Mark Kelly is presented as an almost reluctant politician. Why do you think he ran for the U.S. Senate? How do you think his training as a fighter pilot and astronaut helped him navigate the political arena?
5. Gabby Giffords and Mark Kelly have notably different personalities and strengths. How do they each approach public service and advocacy work? What makes each of them effective in their role?

Extension Activities

1. Identify your local representatives and learn how to reach out to them. What are the issues and bills they are working on now? Are there any bills you would like to support or raise your voice against?
2. Research the gun safety laws in your town. What is the history of their development?
3. Attend a town council meeting or a meet-and-greet event. Listen carefully to the speakers and ask questions.
4. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper about an issue that is important to you. Share your experience and opinions in as powerful and positive a manner as you can. (See additional resources for guidance on writing a letter to the editor.)
5. Imagine you are going to start a nonprofit organization. What would the focus be? How would you craft your message to connect with people? Do you have an idea for a name of the organization?

Additional Resources

Learn how (or brush up on how) the three branches of the federal government are organized and the responsibilities and limits of each branch:

<https://www.usa.gov/branches-of-government#item-214495>

Learn how (or brush up on how) state governments work:

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/our-government/state-local-government/>

Ballotpedia is a virtual encyclopedia of American politics. Through this site, students can learn about elections and ballot measures across the country:

https://ballotpedia.org/Main_Page

iCivics is a nonpartisan education site containing standards-based curriculum resources for educators as well as video games to educate and create civically engaged students:

bit.ly/iCivics-Home

Helpful guidance in writing (and getting published) a letter to the editor:

<https://www.ucsusa.org/resources/writing-effective-letter-editor>

This civic guide for participation includes actions specific to Los Angeles, but also has some useful general information around civic engagement:

<https://www.la101.guide/participation-101>

Resource regarding youth civic engagement:

<https://youth.gov/youth-topics/civic-engagement-and-volunteering>

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