Basic Concepts of Democracy

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Basic Concepts of Democracy

- Democracy is not inevitable…
- It exists because Americans believe in its basic concepts
- It will only exist as long as we continue to subscribe to, and practice those concepts
Basic Concepts of Democracy

- American concept of democracy rests upon these notions:
  - Worth of the Individual
  - Equality of all Persons
  - Majority rule/Minority rights
  - Necessity of Compromise
  - Individual Freedom
Worth of the Individual

- No matter what a person’s standing in life is, each person is a separate and distinct individual.
- This is of an overriding importance in democratic thought.
- The purpose of government is to serve the many individuals who make up society.
Equality of All Persons

- Democracy stresses the worth of individual
  - Jefferson said that “all men are created equal”
- However, democracy does not insist on an equality of conditions for all persons (i.e. – same mental or physical capabilities)
Equality of All Persons

- Democracy does insist that all people are entitled to:
  - Equality of opportunity
  - Equality before the law
- No one should be discriminated against...
- Each person should be free to develop themselves
- Each person should be treated as the equal of all other persons under the law
Majority Rule / Minority Rights

- In a democracy, the will of the people determines public policy.
- Democracy argues that majority of the people will be right more than they will be wrong...
- It is sometimes a trial and error process...The majority will not always be right...Sometimes it will be wrong!!!!!
Majority Rule/ Minority Rights

- Democracy insists upon majority rule restrained by minority rights
- The majority must always recognize the right of the minority, by fair and lawful means, to become the majority
- The majority must always be willing to hear the arguments, criticisms and suggestions of the minority
Necessity of Compromise

- In a democracy, public policy must be a “give and take” among various cooperating interests.
- It has to become a matter of compromise.
- Compromise is a way of achieving majority agreement.
- Not all compromises are good, and not all are necessary.
Individual Freedom

- Democracy can thrive only in an atmosphere of individual freedom.
- There is no such thing as absolute freedom...only in a state of anarchy!
- Democracy says that each individual must be free to do as he or she pleases, as far as the freedom of all will allow.
Individual Freedom

- Oliver Wendell Holmes once said: “The right to swing my fist ends where the other man’s nose begins…”
- The proper balance must be struck between freedom of the individual and the rights of society as a whole.
- Democratic governments must work constantly to strike a balance between the two.