

Organizational Address of IP Chairman Geoff Shaw September, 2008

In college, we have the remarkable opportunity to develop a set of habits of mind that will stay with us forever, no matter what we do next. The mission of the Independent Party is to help us to do exactly that – to guide the opening of our thinking that is the bulwark of intellectual responsibility. My name is Geoffrey Shaw, and I am the 148th Chairman of the Independent Party.

We are the party of independent thinkers – people who build and test their beliefs before a group that values questioning over conformity and argument over assumption. Our motto, “Hear All Sides,” is an imperative that guides our approach to debate, and to intellectual life as a whole. Our members seek to listen carefully to every point of view, no matter how radical or different from their own, and then independently to draw conclusions.

The Independent Party is not associated with a particular ideology or political viewpoint, and the views of our members span the political spectrum. You could say that the IP is home to libertarians, socialists, neo-conservatives, hard-line moderates, and almost everything in between -- but in fact, we resist claustrophobic labels and reject the pressure to adhere to a mass-produced political platform.

Indeed, on the floor of the Independent Party, the question, “what do you believe” is almost always answered the same way. Not with philosophical pronouncements or partisan diatribes, but with the only appropriate response: “about what?”

The diversity of the political philosophies you will find in the IP is anchored by a set of core intellectual commitments.

We believe that debate – if it is to shake your convictions, question your assumptions, and, god forbid, change your mind – is best if it involves genuine disagreement on fundamental principles.

We believe that understanding every perspective on a question is essential to answering it responsibly, and that an educated person can argue every side of an issue with equal vigor.

We believe in the value of inhabiting the ideas of another.

But most of all, we believe that an open mind is the truest mark of genuine intelligence, and that intelligent people have an obligation to hear all sides.

Some of our debates tackle the most pressing political issues of the day: America's role in the world, healthcare, guns, taxes, and much more. Some debates address age-old philosophical dilemmas: religion, rights, the grounds for legitimate authority. Others still deal with quirky scientific topics, like genetic engineering and the ethical responsibilities that come with advancing technology.

But to any debate – whether a formal one with parliamentary procedure, an impromptu coffee date, or an artery-clogging cheese-fries conversation at Yorkside – IPsters bring the openness and intellectual discipline that our motto, “Hear All Sides,” demands.

It's really special that we can admire and respect, and vehemently disagree with each other in the same breath. What makes this unique culture possible is the intense social bond among us. At our dance parties, West Wing viewings, Mory's toasts, classy cocktail parties, and numerous election-themed events, where we might even get to listen to the dynamic speaking style of Cindy McCain, irreverence and hilarity are king. As we like to say: we take our ideas seriously, but we don't take ourselves too seriously.

In this spirit, we go to New York every semester and meet with famous people. Mad Money Host Jim Cramer, 12 Term Congresswoman Pat Schroeder, and the late William F. Buckley have joined us on recent trips. This semester's lineup promises to be spectacular as well.

So, Freshmen: think ahead. How do you want your mind to work when you leave this place? If you want to recognize good points, no matter where they come from; to rethink, to revise, to reinvent; if you want to cherish above all intellectual rigor, clear thinking, and openness of mind, then the Independent Party is the place for you.

Join us tomorrow evening at 7:30pm, in the Branford Common Room, and think independently, when we debate the topic, Resolved: Repeal the 2nd Amendment.