

Levi Pennington

People

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Levi Pennington Writing to Senator Arthur Vandenburg, February 21, 1947

Levi T. Pennington

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February 21, 1947.

Hon. Arthur H. Vandenberg,
Senator from Michigan,
Seante Office Building,
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Vandenberg:--

For years I have been such an admirer of you and your attitudes that I regret to offer unfavorable criticism, and all the more because my wife was a fellow student of yours at the Ferris Institute near the turn of the century.

But the argument which the newspapers say you give for your proposal to give the ballot to citizens at the age of 18 is so fallacious that it savors more of the politician than the statesman, and we have learned to think of you in the latter class. "If the young man of 18 is old enough to fight for his country, he is old enough to vote," that is the argument as the newspapers quote you.

Now if voting and fighting require the same qualities, your argument might be sound. But do they? What makes a good soldier? Is it independence of thought and action, which I take to be qualities of the good citizen? Does a man have to study the questions and the candidates for leadership in order to be a good soldier? As I understand it, the soldier does not choose his leaders, as the voter does; he does not decide the issues, as the voter does. There is no need to go on with this argument. The fact that a young man of 18 is fit to be a fighter does not prove that he is fit to be a voter. He may be, but that does not prove it.

The fallacy of such argument appears when you apply it in a different field. "If a young man of 18 is fit to play on the gridiron for his college, he is fit to select the faculty for the institution." He might be, but the fact that he is a good football player does not prove it.

The argument that because a citizen is old enough to be a soldier he is therefore old enough to be a voter may get you votes -- it surely would if your proposal went through. But it will not increase your reputation for sound argument and real statesmanship. Give us better argument than that if 18-year-olds are to be voters.

Sincerely yours,

Levi T. Pennington.