In recent months, politics has become ubiquitous. Political statements and discussions dominate not only traditional news outlets but also late-night comedy shows. Entertainers, athletes, and even sports commentators increasingly are taking political positions and making political statements. Facebook feeds and casual conversations frequently address political positions and policy issues. Politics seems always to be either at the forefront or else not far behind.

The potential benefits of this trend are obvious: with politics seemingly everywhere, citizens may become better informed and more engaged. Media coverage informs us of political positions and policy proposals. Late-night comedy shows also inform us of these things in addition to lampooning the sometime dishonesty, hypocrisy, and foolishness of our elected and appointed leaders. Entertainers and athletes raise awareness of political and social issues, and Facebook is now as much a place for discussion of political positions and policy concerns as it is a source of information on acquaintances’ recent accomplishments, exploits, and diversions. Casual conversations increasingly goad us to be at least minimally aware of recent political events and ongoing policy debates, and colleagues, friends, and relatives exhort us to become more involved.

Along with these potential benefits, however, come potential dangers. The ubiquity of politics does not necessarily mean that citizens will become better informed or more engaged. Indeed, the consequences can also be rather less beneficial.

Although the news media provide extensive coverage of political positions and policy proposals, much of this coverage tends to be superficial, driven more by “soundbytes” than by substance. This shortcoming is exacerbated by the rise of “fake news” and “alternative facts,” which thrive within the echo chambers that we wittingly or unwittingly create within our Facebook feeds and acquaintance groups. Thus, rather than becoming better informed, we may remain uninformed or, even worse, become misinformed. Even those of us who exert considerable effort to become informed may instead become narrow-minded as we seek to avoid the seemingly constant harping of those who diverge from us politically. In doing so, however, we shun potential opportunities for discussion, debate, and informed disagreement. Perhaps even more damagingly, some of us may welcome opportunities for debate but in doing so treat politics as a spectacle of gladiatorial combat rather than a process of seeking the good of the community. Truth may become less an ideal than an instrument; veritas and Christian virtue may yield to virtù and virtue signaling.

As our politics becomes damaged in this way, the level of political engagement inevitably declines. Ad hominem attacks masquerade as policy debate, and even rational discussion can lead to hurt feelings. We become fatigued and cynical.

I see indicators of these trends as I interact with our students. The enrollment surge of the current spring semester has flattened out for the upcoming fall semester. Students express frustration with the tone and timbre of contemporary political discourse. However, they also are exerting even greater effort to remain informed and engaged. They ask me to recommend pertinent and informative news articles and increasingly turn classroom discussions towards policy implications of the issues we are studying. Most promisingly perhaps, a group of students has worked to recharter the Calvin College Democrats student group this spring with the explicit goal of coordinating with the Calvin College Republicans to encourage informed, public discussion and debate of relevant policy issues. Our students are taking seriously their calling to be agents of redemption and renewal, and it is a joy to participate in this calling with them.

- Joel Westra
To apply, one simply fills out an application as for any other position. But if your application goes on in the process, well, that brings a very rare experience indeed.

Jim Ligtenberg '06, a native of South Dakota, graduated from Calvin as a double major in economics and political science. He took off a year to work as a staff intern for U.S. Sen. John Thune, a Republican from South Dakota, and then tackled law school at Yale University, where he served as editor of the *Yale Law Journal*.

After earning his law degree, Ligtenberg worked for a Washington, D.C., law firm and also clerked in the Fourth District Court of Appeals in Charlottesville, Virginia.

After all of this preparation he decided to apply for a clerkship for Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito Jr.

“I was honored and humbled to have been chosen for a personal interview with Justice Alito,” said Ligtenberg. “That in itself was an incredible experience, one-on-one with an accomplished and brilliant legal mind.”

Ligtenberg was chosen to be one of four clerks for Justice Alito during the 2015–16 court year.

“Working with the Supreme Court structure is truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience,” he said. “It is humbling, intellectually energizing and challenging. The best part was getting to know Justice Alito personally.”

Ligtenberg said there were three regular elements to his work in the court. One was reviewing the petitions that request the court to hear a case. In a given year, about 7,000 to 8,000 petitions make their way to the Supreme Court, he said. “The justices debate the merits of which ones they should hear and that results in accepting around 80 of them.”

In addition, Supreme Court clerks read briefs and help prepare the justice for oral arguments. Finally, clerks help the justice draft case opinions.

Throughout the experience, Ligtenberg enjoyed getting to know the clerks of other justices, too, and there was a lively camaraderie present among the young attorneys. In fact, Ligtenberg said the collegial nature inside the Supreme Court is probably the least understood truth about the institution.

“With all of the attention the Supreme Court and its justices get, the public perception is quite inaccurate,” he said. “Inside the court it is an incredibly civil place. Yes, the justices robustly disagree at times, but they deeply respect one another and the traditions and the institution of the court. I came away with the utmost respect for all of the justices.”

Ligtenberg completed his clerkship in late July 2016, and since then was able to take a long-delayed honeymoon with his wife of almost a year, Lita Tandon, and looked for a new law position in New York City, where the couple moved. He began work this January at Jones Day, an NYC firm.

He’s grateful for his Calvin education, which he said allowed him to develop the analytic, problem-solving, writing and presentation skills that have served him well since graduation.

A semester of study in Washington, D.C., heightened his interest in government and politics, and he recalls professors Bill Stevenson (political science) and Roland Hoksbergen (economics) as important influences.

Ligtenberg is aware there is always more to learn about the law and promoting public justice.

“Another important experience working in the Supreme Court was observing so many great lawyers give their oral arguments before the justices,” he said. “I learned much for my future practice. And taking note of what questions the justices asked was fascinating.”

He is deeply grateful for the Supreme Court experience—and for all of the ways at Calvin and beyond that he’s been trained for future work and service of substance.

*For the original publication of this article, visit: https://calvin.edu/publication/spark/2017/03/01/supreme-education?dotcmsredir=1*
Calvin Students Observe the Democratic Transition

During the first three weeks of January, a group of Calvin students traveled to Washington D.C. to witness the 2017 presidential transition. The interim course was entitled “Democratic Transition: The 2017 Presidential Inauguration” and was led by political science professor Dr. Doug Koopman. The students were given an inside look into Washington D.C. during a tumultuous time.

As Matt Kuckinski, Assistant Director of Media Relations at Calvin College, put it, the students were given all access on this trip. He goes on to share:

Calvin College alumni working in the political arena in Washington, D.C. provided students with access to members of Congress, like Bill Huizenga and Tim Walberg; think tanks, like R Street, American Enterprise Institute and the Center for American Progress; political reporters, like E.J. Dionne and David Brooks. The class also met with young alumni to learn more about the transition to living and working in D.C.

The class also witnessed a confirmation hearing before the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee of the U.S. Senate, watched a broadcast of NPR’s “All Things Considered,” and toured numerous D.C. institutions as well (https://calvin.edu/news/archive/students-at-the-epicenter-of-american-politics).

And on Inauguration weekend, the interim students were able to witness a spectrum of events. On Friday, students were able to attend the historic inauguration of our 45th president, Donald Trump. On Saturday, students were able to participate in the Women’s March in Washington D.C., one of the largest one-day protests in American history. Students, however, expressed gratitude at the opportunity to engage with a variety of individuals. Senior Abbie Schutte noted: “This trip taught me the importance of not becoming ‘siloed,’ as one of our guest speakers put it. I will not always be surrounded by people who agree with me, but it’s important to be opened to learn from different ideas and accept challenges to one’s own opinions.”

Apart from the excitement of inauguration weekend, students continuously noted meeting with alumni as a highlight of the trip. Political science senior Colleen Beunk shares the following:

An aspect of my trip to D.C. that impressed me is the amount of alumni we met. Almost every person we heard from graduated from Calvin and is now working in a wide range of positions. This trip attested to the fact that Calvin well prepares its students to be active participants in important work happening not only in politics in D.C., but all over the country and the world in a wide range of fields.

Sophomore Edgar Lopez agreed, noting “seeing that graduates are doing all sorts of jobs in DC was really cool.”

Overall, the students enjoyed this once in a lifetime opportunity, witnessing one of the most fascinating times in our nation’s history.

Calvin College Political Science Department Remembers Steve Monsma

Lifelong scholar and public servant Steve Monsma passed away on February 18, 2017. He had a long history with Calvin College, graduating in 1958 with his degree in history. After receiving his masters degree from Georgetown University and his Ph.D. from Michigan State University, Dr. Monsma returned to Calvin to teach political science from 1967-1974. He left the college in 1974 to run for political office.

After a career in public service as a member of the Michigan House and Michigan Senate and as an appointee in the state’s Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Social Services, Dr. Monsma once again entered academia at Pepperdine University, where he spent 17 years. Richard Hughes, his colleague at Pepperdine, shares:

By any measure, a man like this is a spiritual giant, and we give thanks for his life, for his work, and for the ways he enriched his friends, the communities where he lived, the politics that governed those communities, and the universities where he served. And after witnessing such an extraordinary life we can only stand in awe and confess once again that singular sentiment that Steve would rejoice to hear. “To God alone be the glory!”

After his time at Pepperdine, Dr. Monsma returned to Calvin College in 2004 as a senior research fellow at Calvin’s Paul B. Henry Institute. His colleague from the Henry Institute, Dr. Corwin Smidt, remembers his time working with Dr. Monsma:

Steve was a gentleman and a scholar in the truest sense of those words. His ultimate identity was not some partisan label, but his Christian faith. He sought to encourage Christian scholars in the academy, to advance Christian scholarship within his discipline of study, to promote a more faithful understanding of public life within the church. He was a faithful disciple of the Lord whom he served.

Dr. Steve Monsma will be dearly missed.
The biennial Henry Symposium on Religion and Public Life was held April 27—April 29, 2017 at the Prince Conference Center on the Calvin College campus. The purpose of the Symposium is to provide opportunities to share current research, foster personal and professional networks, facilitate joint research endeavors, and learn about research opportunities in the field. The Symposium included many panels and events; three of which provided an especially unique opportunity to engage with current popular issues.

The Annual Center for Public Justice Kuyper Lecture
“Rediscovering Sphere Sovereignty in the Age of Trump” - Dr. Charles Glenn

The Center for Public Justice's annual Kuyper Lecture seeks to focus attention on significant questions of religion in public life and Jesus' Lordship over all creation. Their goal is to inspire and equip Christians to pursue a common calling to faithful citizenship and to affirm the vital role of government in upholding public justice. This year’s featured speaker was Dr. Charles Glenn.

Charles Glenn traced parallels between the current political confusion and the period when Abraham Kuyper articulated sphere sovereignty as the basis for religious freedom, and suggested that this principle offers a framework for structuring school choice and reform efforts today, applying this to the role of Islamic schools in the United States as an antidote to cultural alienation and jihadist violence.

Faith and the Democratic Party: A Plenary Session
Featuring Sarah Pulliam Bailey, Burns Strider and Michael Wear

Journalist Sarah Pulliam Bailey, moderator of the discussion, is a religion reporter for the Washington Post, where she writes about politics, culture and anything that has to do with faith. Her co-panelists included Burns Strider, founder and principle of the Eleison Group and a Senior Adviser to Nancy Pelosi and Hillary Clinton, and Michael Wear, founder of Public Square Strategies LLC and former director of faith outreach for President Obama’s 2012 presidential campaign.

The three used this session to discuss faith, the Democratic Party and progressive politics at large.

The Annual Paul B. Henry Lecture
“Before the End of Time: Religion and Politics in this Messy, Broken Age” - Senator Ben Sasse

The annual Paul B. Henry Lecture brings a prominent Christian political practitioner to Calvin to speak about the interplay of religion and politics. The event is intended to inspire the college and the community to actively seek to integrate a Christian worldview with practical politics and public life. This year’s featured speaker was Nebraskan Senator Ben Sasse. Sasse came to the Senate after spending five years as the President of Midland University, a Lutheran college that he took from the verge of bankruptcy to one of the fastest-growing higher education institutions in the country by the time of his departure. He attended Harvard and Oxford and later earned a Ph.D. in American history from Yale.

According to Senator Sasse, we live in a very disoriented time, with massive policy challenges, huge political disruptions, and daunting Constitutional questions. The economic changes surrounding us are monumental, and our culture is chaotic and confused. Within all of these stresses, what is our role as citizens and as Christians?

What Faculty are Watching/Listening To

The Hamilton Soundtrack - Professor Micah Watson

Arrival - Professor Doug Koopman

The Americans - Professor Kevin den Dulk

Political Science Department Politeia Editor: Abbie Schutte www.calvin.edu/academics/departments-programs/political-science/
The Political Science Department congratulates all the graduating seniors and wishes them the best!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Plans and Future Plans</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas Auckerman</td>
<td>Planning to attend law school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ha Young Bahng</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Ryan Bajema</td>
<td>Hoping to work at a non-profit organization in Grand Rapids or Chicago</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colleen Beunk</td>
<td>Hoping to work in immigration policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brooke Bonnema</td>
<td>Attending law school at the University of Michigan</td>
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<tr>
<td>MacKenzie Demien</td>
<td>Planning to move to Washington D.C. after graduation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethan DeVries</td>
<td>Planning to take a gap year to work in government before applying to grad school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jordan Duncan</td>
<td>Moving to Europe to play professional hockey</td>
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<td>Rebecca Emmanuel</td>
<td>Planning to work for a year or two before applying to law school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Majorie Heule</td>
<td>Moving to France to teach school before applying to graduate school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trent Huskey</td>
<td>Planning to take a gap year before applying to law school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quincy Jackson</td>
<td>Attending law school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ryan Kelly</td>
<td>Moving to Los Angeles to work as an actor and PA for National Lampoon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Angela Kostelyk</td>
<td>Planning to take the Foreign Service Exam and work as a Foreign Service Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matthew Leistra</td>
<td>Hoping to move to New York City after graduation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jennifer Meulenberg</td>
<td>Planning to attend graduate school to study Urban and City Planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joshua Nederhood</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kalizya Nseluka</td>
<td>Planning to use this next year to gain international relations work experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Karria Roth</td>
<td>Planning to attend law school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abigail Schutte</td>
<td>Attending graduate school to pursue PhD in political science</td>
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<td>Landon Snieder</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grace Song</td>
<td>Finishing her final semester in France before seeking employment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jacob VandeZande</td>
<td>Attending law school at Michigan State University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rebecca Waldo</td>
<td>Hoping to find a job in translation</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Political Science and International Relations Majors

Graduating Class of 2017

The Political Science Department would like to congratulate the following 2015-2016 scholarship winners:

**Political Science Scholarships**
- Ronald Buikema Scholarship: Matthew Seafield
- DeKryger-Monsman Memorial Prize Scholarship: Lauren Moose
- Honorable John Feikens Memorial Scholarship: Todd Postma
- Peace and Justice Scholarship: Christian Rodriguez
- Dr. James Penning Scholarship: Joanna Jaimes
- Charles Strikwerda Scholarship: Ewura Esi Brookman-Amissah
- Jacob and Rena Van Dellen Scholarship: Ahee Kim
- Johan and Wilma Westra Scholarship: Kelly Looman
- Dr. Bernard Zylstra Memorial Scholarship: Kathryn Post, Samuel Poortenga and Jesse Brink

**Pre-Law Scholarships**
- Bere’ Memorial Scholarship: Christian Rodriguez
- Kenneth L. Ryskamp Scholarship: Kelly Looman
- Waalkes Family Scholarship: Andrew Oppong