

At the University of Mary Washington's social justice teach in on Tuesday, Congresswoman Abigail Spanberger spoke about the importance of civic engagement and being involved in politics.

"Politics is really central to everything. Everything, everything, everything," Spanberger said. "Everything that matters, like the funding to this school, the roads you drive down, the internet you have at your house, the healthcare you do or do not have, the cost of your prescription drugs, the air you breathe, the water you drink. Everything comes down to politics at one point or another."

Because politics have the potential to impact all aspects of life, Spanberger emphasized the need for people to find issues they care about. When people find an issue, advocate for it, and then vote for people with the same priorities, change can occur.

The different experiences individuals have had shapes the perspectives that they can bring to the table. It's not necessary for people to be experts on an issue, she explained, they just need to care enough to be involved in the discussion.

Spanberger also addressed the urgency of participating in this moment, given that there is so much political division and uncertainty.

"Do you want to accept that and turn away?" she asked in response to the doubts people have about the state of politics. "Or do you want to say 'I have all these critiques, and this is not acceptable to me. I want to see changes; I want to see improvement'?"

Spanberger acknowledged that in this country, politics are by the people, for the people, which inherently requires civic engagement by everyone. She encouraged the audience to invite others to participate, as some may need to be told that their voice and their opinions matter.

In her own election, Spanberger relied heavily on inviting people to participate. By convincing others that their opinions mattered, she got them to vote and participate in other ways. People who had not previously participated in politics began to engage by knocking on doors, making phone calls, or writing postcards.

"Ultimately, it was successful because, well, I won; the campaign was successful," Spanberger said. "But that success was because of people who believed in something that they wanted to see- something different, something specific for some and very unspecific for others."

Spanberger first ran for Virginia's seventh congressional district in 2018, and she was the first Democratic candidate to win her seat since 1968. She is currently in her second term and seeking reelection.

Before running for Congress, she was in the CIA, but decided to move to the private sector because she wanted to improve her community. She got involved with Moms Demand Action, a group that advocates for policy change to reduce gun violence. She felt her prior experience

carrying firearms could help contribute to the conversation of gun violence protection, an issue she had a special interest in.

After the 2016 election, she felt worried about the future direction of the country. Rather than turning away from politics, she decided to take action for change by running for Congress.

At the end of her speech, Spanberger reflected on something John Lewis, the late civil rights activist, said at his last Democratic Caucus, “Don’t get weary and let’s continue to work.”

Spanberger’s final call to action was based off Lewis’ statement. She instructed the audience that no matter how difficult certain issues are to talk about or how unlikely change seems, if something needs to be improved, civic engagement must continue.