

Newsletter 48. Civics Education, an American Staple August 1, 2026

In recent months, I have devoted a couple of newsletters to what I see as a compelling need for more civics education for students and adults alike in order to make us all better citizens who not only receive the privileges but also meet the obligations afforded us by living in the United States. These privileges include voting for elected officials that will work to lower our grocery, energy, healthcare, and housing costs--- these obligations include voting for elected officials of good character who will follow the Constitution, make us a better nation, and enhance the respect and leadership worldwide that we have worked so hard to build over the past 8 decades.

I have discussed the obvious role of local, state, and federal education departments in increasing and improving civics education, but this alone is not sufficient to adequately address the above in time to reverse the downward spiral in the performance of our administration and legislature, the existential erosion of our democracy.

The answer that I see of course includes continuing to support the efforts of education departments addressing the social studies standards for a solid foundation with lessons in civics, U.S. history, and government baked into primary and secondary schooling as the leading priority.

But, in addition, we need a truly ground swell in which we all participate not only as individuals, i.e., we the people, but also in groups in which I include, in addition to the above-mentioned academia, everything from social groups and organizations to corporate America, and even the military.

Rotary and Lions Clubs and other social organizations currently having difficulty signing up new members could achieve a new lease on life if they would also direct their efforts to providing civics education in the form of discussion groups possibly including a good citizen test. For the discussion group lessons, these organizations would use appropriate sources, e.g., the Center for Civic Education, iCivics, Civic Learning Institute and the Bill of Rights Institute for guidelines and use one of the club's members or another local resident with a suitable background as the teacher. Note that this individual need not necessarily have a specific background in government, US history or civics, but only an understanding of the lessons and a well spoken ability to facilitate the group discussion. The good citizen test, if offered, could be somewhat similar to that given to immigrants being naturalized and/or it could be based on guidelines that the same sources for the lessons could be asked to provide. If potential new young members think that this opportunity might look good on a resume when applying for a new job or an advancement, they might rush to join the organization offering it. Other social organizations or community groups that could readily offer these group discussions include libraries, national or local veterans' associations, or even book clubs. The Scouts USA part of Scouting America (formerly Boy Scouts) already has civics education as part of their Eagle Scouts program in place. Colleges who offer adult education courses in their locale should include civics education. Also, another welcome possibility would be church groups of any denomination headed up by the pastor or a board of deacons to step through any church/state barriers and get involved to the extent that they choose---perhaps survey their parish on this. For a church to participate, this would be a big step, but a parish of one of the more liberal

denominations, e.g., the United Church of Christ's branch of the Congregational Church, might be interested. The opportunities for this ground swell are endless. We're talking about turning what we normally describe simply as discussion groups into informal civics education.

An excellent model to use as a guideline for these lessons would be "Great Decisions", the Foreign Policy Association's discussion program of world affairs in which the participants read a briefing book, watch the videos and meet with members of their community to discuss the issues.

Another excellent model is Braver Angels whose mission is to "inspire and equip Americans to practice courageous citizenship across political differences through skill-building, convening, and collaborative action." Visit BraverAngels.org to learn how "to start a local alliance."

Private schools unencumbered by state approval requirements for civics lessons would fit nicely in this effort---an occasion for interested Directors to have a say in the curriculum without stepping on the toes of the teaching staff in elite (excuse the word, but it fits here) private institutions---in return for increased donations!

Now, let's get corporate America involved. Before I go on, let me anticipate and counter the reaction from Friedman capitalists who obligate corporations solely to the benefit of their shareholders with the portion of the profits distributed for the common good only through taxation determined by the government or through philanthropy. Here I would counter that this movement, if truly ground-swell, would require all of us from individuals to organizations even including corporations ---remember Citizens United?--- to take

responsibility as I mentioned earlier to fulfill our obligations in return for the benefits afforded us by the Constitution, if our democracy is to survive. This responsibility is best described by Richard Haass in his book *The Bill of Obligations---The Ten Habits of Good Citizens*, one obligation being to “Support the Teaching of Civics” a pillar on which all of Step Forward America stands.

Our individual responsibility in this effort will be to initiate a chain---from all of us, we the people, to our elected officials asking them when they communicate with their corporate constituents to make a plea for these contacts to get involved in the education of their recruits and employees with civics lessons.

Note, and this is critical, no federal, state or local government would be involved with this education. The basic idea of this would come from the public, you and me, relayed to the corporations by our elected officials merely recommending that the education be any one of, or a combination of, lessons that would be readily available from the previously mentioned respected sources. We don't have to be more specific. Corporations would deal directly with these sources. We could expect a range of lessons and tests---some partisanship cannot be avoided but can be minimized if the corporations are encouraged to use a diverse committee of their managers to make the selections. HR departments would be responsible for determining the extent of their effort and incorporating the results in hiring decisions. Managers would be encouraged to do likewise with promotions. The education could be mandated or voluntary as the company chooses. This is a huge opportunity for corporate America, especially high tech and other big business, to rebuild their reputation with the American public by implementing a voluntary program that would not be subject to

government regulations. Sure, there will be some partisan issues, but corporate administrations will follow their own ideology, probably in some cases supported by their Boards. Unfortunately, some will forego this opportunity in order to curry favor with a federal administration that sees enlightening the voters as detrimental to their autocratic self-interests.

The costs and lost production time for the corporations would be minimal. Small and minority owned businesses would gain a valuable marketing advantage, and startups would have a positive image for investors. And this would be one benefit available to both the employer and the employees without the encumbrance of government regulations---all voluntary for the businesses participating. And it would build a more positive bond between elected officials and their constituent businesses.

Finally, in addition to social organizations and corporate America, the third group to involve, albeit with much fewer participants, could be the military, now consisting of approximately 1.3 million active-duty service members and around 760,000 Reserve and National Guard personnel. Here the individual services could use lessons provided by the above-mentioned sources or develop their own, perhaps using those sources as guidelines, and include them in basic training, possibly offering additional voluntary civics education later in the enlistment.

In closing, addressing all the current challenges related to preserving our democracy, how would you answer the following question on a good citizen test?

- The President of the United States has taken an oath to “preserve, protect and defend the Constitution,” Article II of

which requires that “he shall take care that the laws be faithfully executed.” On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the highest, how would you rate the current President on this?

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