

**Statement to the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service**  
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Mr. Chairman and Distinguished Members of the Commission, thank you for this opportunity to share my perspectives on the need to elevate and prioritize civic education across the states.

I'm a Floridian. And that's relevant for a few reasons that will become clear as I offer my testimony. I live in the most storied purple state in the curriculum. I grew up in the suburbs of Ft. Lauderdale. Quite blue. I taught high schools social studies in a semi-rural community in northeast Florida. And I live in Jacksonville—a red community to be sure.

I talk to a lot of folks from a diverse array of perspectives, and more and more it feels like we are operating from a shared assumption—one that crosses ideological and partisan lines—that things are pretty rough right now in our country.

We are seeing decreasing levels of trust in democratic principles that were once just assumed to be sacred, as well as an increasing belief that democracy is a bad form of government with 25% of those polled holding that view.

It is a sad state of affairs indeed, and fixing everything will require many solutions. But I'm here today to make the case that none of those solutions matter. They will not work. They will ultimately fail—unless we prioritize more and better civic education. I know this. I believe this. In fact, I believe the exact opposite is precisely how we got here today.

We failed an entire generation, and in return, those generations are failing us, or at least our democratic republic. And it all started in the late 1950s when Russia launched Sputnik.

Remember: the whole purpose of public schools in the first place was to prepare students for their roles as citizens in our democratic republic. But we stopped teaching it. And the results are clear. We have a democratic republic—a form of government that relies upon knowledgeable, engaged citizens—that is operating without enough knowledgeable and engaged citizens to sustain it.

And please don't mistake my message for nostalgia or the tired obsession of a history nerd, although that label would be more than fair. We have clear evidence of what happens when we stop teaching civics. We're experiencing that now in stark relief.

But we also have clear evidence of what happens when we bring it back.

Regardless of your view, the nation was moved by the advocacy of the students from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL who knew what to do after their school suffered the most horrific of tragedies.

They knew what to do because they were *taught* what to do. And they were taught what to do because they live in my home state of Florida. The Florida state legislature passed the Justice Sandra Day O'Connor Civic Education act in 2010. As a result, every middle school student gets a year of civics. These young people received a year of civics *in middle school*.

And civic education works! Students who receive high-quality civic education are more likely to vote and engage in political life, work on community issues, be socially responsible, and complete college and develop employable skills. Which, I know is not the purpose of your inquiry, but I also know what sells.

Unfortunately, Florida is an outlier—not the norm.

Of the 40 states that require civics coursework, only nine require a full year of instruction, and only 17 require a civics exam to graduate.

How can we expect the next generation to actively and civilly participate in our democratic republic if they don't even know the meaning of the word democratic or republic?

Florida's 2018 seniors were the first class to graduate after implementation of the Sandra Day O'Connor Civic Education Act. While the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School students benefitted from an overall high quality education, all of Florida's students now have opportunities for high quality civic education as a result of the investments made by the state.

We need more such investments. We need investments in promoting similar civic education policies in *all* states.

We need investments in strong curriculum, robust professional development experiences, and meaningful accountability measures. We need investments in promoting civically minded school leadership and expanding youth voice in that leadership.

We need to invest in civic education. Full. Stop.

iCivics is leading the charge. While our curriculum team hustles to serve over 170K teachers and upwards of 5 million students a year with engaging, effective, and free civic learning products, our field building team is leading a coalition of 50 organizations, and growing.

By 2026, our nation's 250<sup>th</sup> birthday, we believe all American students can and should be exposed to a high quality civics education. We must restore civic education to its rightful place as the primary mission of our public schools.

We need more and better civic education, and let me briefly mention what I mean by better:

- Service learning where volunteer work is explicitly tied to classroom learning
- Simulations—digital and otherwise—of democratic processes and behaviors
- Discussion of current and controversial issues by trained teachers
- School cultures that emphasize civic engagement across all disciplines and extracurricular activities
- Student voice in the operation of schools and classrooms and in the cultivation of a culture of civic engagement

I will conclude my testimony by offering a summary of my recommendations. Respectfully, I ask the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service to

- Publicly support the [CivXNow](#) Coalition's platform, especially its effort to persuade every state to increase the time and resources devoted to civic learning, including increasing course requirements and instituting mandatory consequential testing in civics at the Upper Elementary, Middle and High School levels.
- Urge Congress to restore federal funding for competitive grants to *at least* its pre-2011 levels of \$45M for civics and \$103M for American History
- Advocate for the National Assessments of Educational Progress (NAEP) test in civics to (1) be administered every year and (2) for the results to be provided by state, so that state policymakers can compare their state's performance with other states.