

**Civic and Character Education in Utah –
A Connection to History and the Continuing Stewardship of
All Citizens and Public Officials**

By: Representative LaVar Christensen (2006)

PREFACE

In 2006, Representative LaVar Christensen was asked by the University of Utah's Hinckley Institute of Politics to author an article for publication in its Annual Journal. He chose to address the role of Civic and Character Education in support of Representative Democracy in Utah and throughout America. This publication is now also available as a color enhanced booklet and reproduction of the earlier Hinckley article. It is distributed to Utah educators with the cooperation of The State Office of Education and the support of the Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge.

President Dwight Eisenhower first established the Freedoms Foundation in 1949. For more than 50 years, it has been mentoring young people all across America in the principles of freedom, which are so powerfully evident in the story of the American Revolution and the founding of our nation. The Utah Chapter is among the nations strongest. Each year, they award as many as 50 or more scholarships to Utah high school students and teachers. This enables them to attend the Valley Forge campus for weeklong instruction, followed by peer leadership participation at their local schools when they return.

President George Washington said that there is “no duty more pressing on a Legislature” than to support a plan for communicating the “science of government” to our youth who are the “future guardians of the liberties of the country.” It is the shared hope and objective of the author, The State Office of Education and the Freedoms Foundation that this publication will inform and motivate administrators, teachers and students in all of Utah’s public schools as they go forward and implement this important legislation.

Civic and Character Education in Utah -- A Connection to History And The Continuing Stewardship of All Citizens and Public Officials

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I appreciate all that the Hinckley Institute and its Journal do to educate the citizens of Utah. A virtuous, informed and responsible citizenry is essential in America, where our laws represent the “witness and external deposit of our moral life.” (Holmes, p.151). In 1787, when a new Constitution was signed and adopted after months of debate and deliberations, a woman anxiously asked Dr. Benjamin Franklin, “What type of government have you delegates given us, Sir?” He wisely replied, “A Republic, madam, if you can keep it.” (Isaacson, p. 459).

“Keeping” our Republic is the continuing stewardship of every succeeding generation of Americans. At Gettysburg, Lincoln honored the dead who gave the “last full measure of devotion” to the cause that would decide whether a nation “conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal....can long endure.” He called for a heightened resolve that “this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

“Freedom is a fragile thing and never more than a generation away from extinction.” (Ryan, p. 32). It cannot be taken for granted. “It must be fought for and defended constantly by each generation...” (Ryan, p. 32).

We are fortunate today to live in a time of rapid travel and rapid communication. Television, print media and Internet flood us with news updates. World history and world geography are constantly before us. No one can really be completely uninformed or unaware unless they choose to turn away and be indifferent. Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” Thus, “the only choice we have is to be consciously aware of our worldviews and criticize them where they need criticizing, or let them work on us unnoticed and acquiesce to living unexamined lives.” (Smith, 21).

Winston Churchill said, “The farther back you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see.” (Feulner, p. 4). History is the foundation on which the present rests. The lessons and experience of those who have gone before are a source of wisdom and strength for the generations that follow. It is a continuing process. It is the steady march of freedom. It calls for citizens who understand and value the price and origin of their independence and know what is required to maintain it. As President John Quincy Adams said, “Posterity—you will never know how much it has cost my generation to preserve your freedom. I hope you will make good use of it.” (Federer, p. 20).

In such a country, citizens take the right and responsibility to vote very seriously. They study the issues and the candidates. They evaluate current conditions and determine the issues that are most pressing and promising. They make principled decisions. They exhibit a collective wisdom and judgment that reflects a willingness to subordinate individual self interests to the greater public good.

Today, in the schooling of our youth, we speak of a global economy, what is required to compete and the need for greater math and science initiatives. As important as those considerations are, they send an unintended message of preeminent materialism. As we strive to qualify and equip the worker, we also must not neglect the citizen.

The very purpose and nucleus of all public education is civic or citizenship education. Thus, Thomas Jefferson advocated a public education system that would place an elementary school in every county within three miles of every household and a college within a day's (horse) ride to be funded by self imposed taxes for the good of everyone. (Allison, p. 411-12). He understood, as did the other Founders of this nation, that representative democracy in America depends upon the existence of a responsible and educated citizenry.

National studies and statistics reveal a downward trend in the level of civic knowledge and engagement by all Americans but especially among today's young people. Since the right to vote was lowered to age 18 in 1972, declining numbers of young people vote each year. Many lack interest, trust and knowledge about American politics and public life in general. And yet, our goal is to keep the chain of political engagement in this Country unbroken. President John Quincy Adams stated on behalf of the first generation of successors to the Founding of our nation:

“Since the adoption of this social compact one of these generations has passed away. It is the work of our forefathers...through a most eventful period in the annals of the world...We now receive it as *a precious inheritance* from those to whom we are indebted for its establishment, *doubly bound by the examples which they have left us and by the blessings*

which we have enjoyed as the fruits of their labors to transmit the same unimpaired to the succeeding generation.” (Hunt, p. 76).

In 2003, Congress adopted and funded a national push for greater civic education in America’s public schools. For the past three years, I have served as a delegate from Utah to the National Congressional Conference on Civic Education. (All 50 states are united in this five-year effort to elevate civic education throughout our nation). Senators Howard Stephenson, Chris Buttars and Karen Hale from the Legislative Branch, Chief Justice Christine Durham and Judge Judith Billings of the Judicial Branch and Ed Dalton from the State School Board have all joined in this effort. Kathy Dryer of Law Related Education Projects is our skilled and diligent State Coordinator. Alan Griffin of the State Office of Education leads a combined and well-coordinated effort to provide valuable training and support to our school teachers throughout the state. Together, we work with a large coalition of civic education and service learning leaders who are all dedicated to elevating civic education in grades K-16 in Utah.

I have visited numerous classes and have spoken to hundreds of students to spread the message and meaning of good citizenship. It is something I am very passionate about. I love to be with the students and teachers and I never tire of or miss the chance to discuss with them the “blessings of liberty” secured by our Constitution.

History is not a body of facts and figures simply to be memorized and then tested upon. It is a heritage and a legacy to be internalized and relied upon. I am inspired by the sheer reality of our history—the sobering recognition that every

account is the story of how someone like you or me chose to live their life. I can't help but think what it must have been like for the individual families of the heroic Minutemen of Lexington, Massachusetts on April 18, 1775. The King sent British troops to capture the colonial ammunitions stored at Concord. Paul Revere, William Dawes and Samuel Prescott raced through the night by horseback to sound the alarm of the advancing troops. The first encounter occurred at Lexington Green after Paul Revere successfully awakened and warned Samuel Adams and John Hancock.

I contemplate the thought of a small home where a candle is lit and a little girl is awakened in the night by the sound of shuffling in the hallway. A father goes to the closet and reaches for a coat and a musket. "Where are you going?" the little girl asks. "Back to bed, sweetheart," the father answers. "I'm just going down to the Green. Some of the men in town are gathering there." "Why Dad?" asks the little girl. "Because the British are coming," says the brave father. "Are you coming back?" the little girl presses further. "Yes honey. All will be well. Now, back to sleep."

At the Green, Captain John Parker gathered the 130 Minutemen of Lexington. At dawn, a scout brought Captain Parker news that the British were close at hand. He immediately turned to his drummer and ordered him to beat to arms. The men formed two lines on the Common beside the road to Concord. Then, the scarlet red column of British soldiers approached. Captain Parker's immortal command is now carved in stone: "Stand your ground; don't fire unless fired upon; but if they mean to have a war, let it begin here!" Try as the men might

to avoid a conflict, a pistol shot rang out and echoes unidentified through history. It sparked an outburst of gunfire and soon, eight Americans lay dead and nine were wounded. The conflict heightened the next day at Concord's North Bridge. A similar unidentified gunshot again rang out and is forever remembered as the "shot heard round the world" (McDowell, 1967, p. 38). Colonial resistance continued to mount as the British Regulars were repeatedly attacked along what would become known as "Battle Road."

Just a few weeks earlier, delegates to the Second Virginia Convention gathered at St. John's Church in Richmond Virginia. A tide of events was moving towards Independence but it was still a bold and almost unspeakable proposition. Patrick Henry, from Hanover County, rose from his seat in the third pew and respectfully noted that:

"Different men often see the same subject in different lights; and, therefore, I hope it will not be thought disrespectful [if]...I shall speak forth *my* sentiments freely, and without reserve...Should I keep back my opinions at such a time, through fear of giving offense, I should consider myself guilty of treason toward my country and of an act of disloyalty toward the *majesty of Heaven, which I revere above all earthly kings.*" (Campbell, p.128).

Continuing on, Henry declared, "I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided; that is the lamp of experience. I know of no way of judging the future but by the past." (Campbell, p. 129). Then, he asked, plaintively, what was there in the conduct of the British ministry for the past ten years that could possibly justify any further hope of peace and unity with England? Instead, he urged:

"Have we anything new to offer upon the subject? Nothing. We have held the subject up at every light of which it is capable; but it has been all in vain...We have done everything that could be done to avert the storm, which

is now coming on...If we wish to be free...we must fight! I repeat it, Sir, we must fight! An appeal to arms and to the God of Hosts is all that is left us!" (Campbell, p. 129-30).

To those who thought the idea of independence was unattainable, Henry replied:

"They tell us, Sir, that we are weak—unable to cope with so formidable an adversary...Sir, we are not weak, if we make a proper use of those means which the God of nature hath placed in our power. Three millions of people, armed in the holy cause of liberty, and in such a country as that which we possess, are invincible by any force which our enemy can send against us. *Besides, Sir, we shall not fight our battles alone. There is a just God who presides over destinies of nations, and who will raise up friends to fight our battles for us...*There is no retreat, but in submission and slavery! Our chains are forged, their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston! The war is inevitable—and let it come!! I repeat it, Sir, let it come!!! Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, **give me liberty or give me death!** (Campbell, p. 130).

Henry's electrifying declaration was a trumpet voice uttered during a time of confused thinking and timid indecision. It was an appeal directed to the hearts of men who loved liberty. It was the spark needed to fire into action the plans for freedom and independence already formed by the Continental Congress. (Campbell, p. 130-31). This proud moment in our American heritage is but one of the many instances in our history which confirm the "firm reliance on divine providence" expressed in the Declaration of Independence and in our national motto, "In God We Trust."

A soldier, Colonel Edward Carrington, listened from a window in the east end of St. John's Church. He was so moved by Henry's eloquence that he exclaimed, "Let me be buried on this spot." (Campbell, p. 131). His request was honored 35 years later. I have been to that spot more than once. It has been somewhat of a pilgrimage for me over the years to visit and connect with as many of the sacred spots as possible in our country and in other parts of the world where our American heritage is preserved: Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Colonial Williamsburg, Boston's "Freedom Trail" and beyond, Mount Vernon, Monticello, Washington's Crossing, Valley Forge, Gettysburg, Springfield, Illinois with Lincoln's home, law office and the train station from which he left knowing that he would not likely ever return, Ford's Theater and more, including Washington, D.C. with all of its monuments and memorials and where the important work of the people continues.

Again and again, I am reminded how blessed we are as a nation and what it means to be an American citizen. It is a deeply moving experience to walk through the American Cemetery at Normandy, France with its 9,386 individual crosses or Stars of David commemorating those who there gave their lives in World War II. I have also stood at Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, Germany and reflected on what it took to bring down the "Iron Curtain", the Communist wall that for so long denied freedom to a large segment of humanity after World War II.

In America, we recognize and freely accept the corresponding duties and responsibilities that come with freedom. The signers of both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution clearly understood that liberty is not license and it does not mean simply doing whatever anyone wants without constraints or limitations. John Adams famously declared, “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.” (Federer, p. 10-11). Thus, the hope of America as it is passed from one generation to the next lies not in its economic might or military power but rather in the life of its conscience. That is where we find the soul of American politics. That is what defines the true nature of humanity and gives life its ultimate meaning.

At every turn in our nation’s history, we are inspired and strengthened by the many examples of courageous citizens who faithfully met the challenges that confronted our nation. Consider the immense courage of General George Washington when he crossed the Delaware River and won the Battle of Trenton after his own General Gates had previously said that the colonists could not attack a snowman and not within eleven days of when the soldiers’ enlistments ran out. (Fast, p.90). Washington, however, would not accept defeat. Under terrible conditions, he successfully crossed the river on Christmas Day, 1776 with his

small and ill-equipped army and defeated the British and Hessian troops at Trenton.

To help preserve this important heritage among our youth, I sponsored and passed **HB22 in 2004 (“Civic and Character Education in Schools”)**. It is now in statute as *Utah Code 53A-13-109*. It provides as follows:

- (1) *As used in this section:*
 - a. *“Character Education” means reaffirming values and qualities of character which promote an upright and desirable citizenry.*
 - b. *“Civic Education” means the cultivation of informed, responsible participation in political life by competent citizens committed to the fundamental values and principles of representative democracy in Utah and the United States.*
 - c. *“Values” means time-established principles or standards of worth.*
- (2) *The Legislature recognizes that:*
 - a. *Civic and Character Education are fundamental elements of the public education system’s core mission as originally intended and established under Article X of the Utah Constitution;*
 - b. *Civic and Character Education are fundamental elements of the constitutional responsibilities of public education and shall be a continuing emphasis and focus in public schools;*
 - c. *The cultivation of a continuing understanding and appreciation of representative democracy in Utah and the United States among succeeding generations of educated and responsible citizens is important to the nation and the state;*
 - d. *The primary responsibility for the education of children within the state resides with their parents or guardians and that the role of state and local governments is to support and assist parents in fulfilling that responsibility;*
 - e. *Public schools fulfill a vital purpose in the preparation of succeeding generations of informed and responsible citizens who are deeply attached to essential democratic values and institutions; and*
 - f. *The happiness and security of American society relies upon the public virtue of its citizens which requires a united commitment to a moral social order where self-interests are willingly subordinated to the greater common good.*

(3) Through an integrated curriculum, students shall be taught in connection with regular school work;

- a. Honesty, integrity, morality, civility, duty, honor, service, and obedience to law;*
- b. Respect for and an understanding of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitutions of the United States and of the State of Utah;*
- c. Utah history, including territorial and pre-territorial development to the present;*
- d. The essentials and benefits of the free enterprise system;*
- e. Respect for parents, home, and family;*
- f. The dignity and necessity of honest labor; and*
- g. Other skills, habits, and qualities of character which will promote an upright and desirable citizenry and better prepare students to recognize and accept responsibility for preserving and defending the blessings of liberty inherited from prior generations and secured by the constitution.*

(4) Local school boards and school administrators may provide training, direction, and encouragement, as needed, to accomplish the intent and requirements of this section and to effectively emphasize Civic and Character Education in the course of regular instruction in the public schools.

(5) Civic and Character Education in public schools are:

- a. Not intended to be separate programs in need of special funding or added specialists to be accomplished; and*
- b. Core principles which reflect the shared values of the citizens of Utah and the founding principles upon which representative democracy in the United States and the state of Utah are based.*

Civic education is not fully effective if it is not accompanied by character education as well. **Theodore Roosevelt said, “To educate a man in mind and not morals is to educate a menace to society.” (Myers, p. 236). Benjamin Franklin stressed that “only a virtuous people are capable of freedom.” (Myers, p. 236).** One of the underlying premises for establishing a public education system in America was the understanding that in a representative democracy, children need to learn the values that are necessary for good

citizenship. Education's original aim was not simply to convey knowledge but rather to forge character.

Utah's efforts in promoting character as well as civic education are a call for a united strategy in support of our shared values as a state and a community. It is not intended to be a journey of nostalgia but rather recognizes that honest and dedicated citizens must work together in the midst of a coarsening culture. It requires continuing debate as to what kind of society we intend to build as we move into the future. We are guided by time-honored principles drawn from our past, which we seek to effectively apply to present circumstances.

The primary responsibility for teaching children rests with home and family and society should be a support and not a hindrance. As one writer has wisely noted:

“It is a mistake to think we can compensate for cultural ruin through a new generation of super parents...It is naive to think that we will conquer the problem of culture by merely insisting that parents build even thicker and higher hedges of protection around their families. This would require a degree of isolation that the vast majority of parents are incapable of or unwilling to carry out. This is not only naive, it is wrong.” (Eberly, p.3).

David Blankenhorn, President of the Institute for American Values, has also stated: “Parenting should not require a heroic struggle against the world beyond. A good society should not impose that scale of burden on parents.” (Eberly, p.3). There is such a thing as a healthy culture—an environment “where families are protected and children are granted normal childhoods characterized by unhurried innocence.” (Eberly, p. 5).

To give structure and ensure continuity for our state’s efforts to maintain civic and character education’s role as the central purpose and nucleus of all public education, I sponsored and passed HB339 in the 2006 General Session. It is now in statute as **Utah Code 67-1a-10-11**. It establishes the “**Commission on Civic and Character Education**”. As the State’s Chief Election Officer, the Lieutenant Governor will lead this new Commission. The Commission “provides leadership to the state’s continuous focus on civic and character education in the public schools and institutions of higher education and make recommendations.” It also reflects the Legislature’s “recognition that the cultivation of a continuing understanding and appreciation of representative democracy in Utah and the United States among succeeding generations of educated and responsible citizens is important to the nation and state.”

President George Washington in an Address to Congress said that there is *no duty more pressing on a Legislature* than to support a plan for communicating the “science of government” to our youth who are the “future guardians of the liberties of the Country.” (Parry, p. 672).

I am grateful to help advance civic and character education in Utah’s public schools. What the Hinckley Institute does for college students and our community is an important part of what we are striving to do at every level of education in our State. The same commitment and hope expressed by President John Quincy Adams in 1825 continues today. We are striving to transmit the “precious inheritance” of American citizenship “*unimpaired* to the succeeding generation.” (Hunt, p.76). That is our stewardship. That is our charge.

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