

OPINION

VOICE of the CHIEFTAIN

Elected leaders work for the voter

Oregon lawmakers did something good recently when they approved Senate Bill 513, a measure that requires high school students to complete one semester of civics before they graduate.

The bill goes into effect beginning in the 2025-26 school year.

Lawmakers passed a similar bill in 2017 that strongly encouraged school districts to offer civics instruction, but it was not required.

Senate Bill 513 probably will not garner banner headlines or spark controversy, but is probably one of the most crucial pieces of legislation to come down the pike in decades.

That is because knowledge regarding how our government works is, at times, absent from public discourse. All one must do is look to the recent presidential election or the tenure of several of our past presidents. Former Presidents Donald Trump, Barack Obama and George W. Bush could not simply rule exclusively. That is not how our system of government works. Each president can do a whole lot by themselves — using such edicts as executive orders — but in the end they are beholden not only to the people but to Congress.

A firm, basic knowledge of how our republic functions, how legislation is created and who gets to make the final decision on key issues is crucial for not only our youths but for all voters.

We in the news business sometimes make the error that everyone understands how our government works, and then stand in dismay when people make what appear to be outrageous statements about democracy.

The path to work within our system to make change or to get something done begins with the knowledge of how the machinery of democracy works.

Why is it important? Civic education is critical because if we do not know how the system functions, we cannot act as careful observers of our elected leaders. Our elected leaders — from the local city council all the way up to the president — are not bestowed with unlimited power to do as they choose. They are constrained by a check-and-balance system brilliantly conceived by our Founding Fathers.

Many of the recent problems the nation encountered can be directly traced to an ignorance of how our government works. Many do not know how a legislative bill works. Where it is developed. Others believe a president carries unlimited power and can make “things happen” on a whim.

The first lesson in civics education should be the easiest. That lesson is elected leaders work for the voter. Period.



LETTER to the EDITOR

‘Civic Pride?’ letter revisited

I am updating a letter I wrote in 2002. Here is the original letter called “Civic Pride?”

“The smokers in front of the Pioneer Guest Home dispose of their cigarette butts in the same time-honored manner as the nearby well-dressed tourists do — on the street.

“A tour of the Enterprise downtown area will show many other examples of missing civic pride. City Hall is badly in need of paint and the beautiful Carnegie Library has crumbling and leaking foundations and no handicap access. There is also the matter of the swimming pool repairs, expensive clocks at confusing intersections, the need for well-maintained year-round public toilets, lack of parking for shoppers since storekeepers and their staff park in front of their stores, handicapped access to these same stores, etc.

“So, at what socio-economic level does civic pride start? With our teenag-

ers and residents of ‘Halfway’ homes or with our elected officials and community businesspeople?”

Let’s address the positive first. The clock has been fixed, the library has an elevator thanks to our librarian, Denine Rautenstrauch. The staff at the courthouse (a landmark) endured many years of construction and now this building is ADA compliant, too.

The pool was removed and, when the weather allows, we have an ice rink. Maybe a permanent indoor ice rink could be a dream for a wealthy donor to our city. And we have public toilets near the tennis courts in the park. Thanks to many soccer fans, we now have a permanent indoor arena and our young teenagers are improving the skateboard park.

Parking is still an issue and handicap access to many stores will never be possible, but at least the Oregon Department of Transportation is improving the handicap/stroller ramps. There is the sign coming into town — that looks great.

City Hall did not get its coat of paint since unfortunately, it burned down. After much delay, the town now has a beautiful City Hall and a large fire hall.

Improvements to many heritage buildings have been made but there are still many empty stores. Wild Carrot Herbals is a new addition as are other stores too numerous to mention. The OK Theatre looks great and includes ADA bathrooms. When COVID-19 hit the community, it seemed to halt much of the downtown remodeling. On the corner of River and Main, there are several buildings undergoing improvements although the Litch Building has put a new meaning to the words “Coming Soon.” Admittedly, it will be an eye-catching building when finished.

Due to a lack of space, I neglected many improvements being done in this town so there is civic pride but it will be years before tourists can exclaim, “What a great little town Enterprise is!”

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