

2-3-21

Statement in support of HB2039. Kansas House Committee on Education

My Name is Carl Maughan, I am a lawyer, and a proud naturalized citizen of the United States.

I would like to thank Representative Huebert and the members of the committee for the opportunity to be heard on this subject, which is close to my heart.

I think that we can agree that the level of education about our constitution, history and our civic institutions is shockingly poor in many segments of our society and that making improvements in this area and stressing the importance of civics will be good for our state, and our country. The measure that you are considering here represents a small step toward that end, and I would like to applaud Mr. Huebert and this committee for giving this important issue the consideration it deserves.

As someone who has taken the naturalization test and helped others prepare for it, I have come to believe that it represents the bare minimum knowledge that a citizen of this country should have about our history and our civic institutions. Any high school student who has paid even passing attention to their required civics courses or has simply lived in our society while being marginally aware of current events should have no difficulty passing such a test. Having them do so as they prepare to enter fully into the civil society is not too much to ask.

The state legislature has recognized the importance of civic education for our young people and entrusted our education system to do so. Requiring that high school students pass a civics test like the one required of new citizens is not only good for our society as a whole, but it also represents a common sense way to determine whether our educational system is properly discharging its statutory obligation to provide for the civic education of our high school students.

But more importantly than that, it is a measure which will help strengthen and unite this nation.

I have had the opportunity to give the keynote address at several naturalization ceremonies including that at which my father was naturalized, and that at which I was naturalized. When talking to those who are poised to take on the rights and duties of citizenship I have sought to highlight how exceptional and unique the United States is amongst the nations of the world.

Most nations are bound together by a common language, a common culture and common geographical boundaries. However, the United States is different. We are a nation made up of people who come from different backgrounds, different cultures, different geographical areas and who's families speak, or have spoken, many different languages. What binds us together as a nation is not merely language, culture and borders but an allegiance to a constitutional system of government and to the ideas, philosophy and history which created that system. In this sense, Civic education represents the very glue that holds us together as a nation.

We are in a time of great division in our country. A time in which our disunity is nearing existential proportions. It is imperative that we take all possible steps to reinforce the bonds of nationhood and the fortify the unity that comes from patriotism. Strengthening our common understanding of our history, and the ideas which lie at the foundation of our nation is essential to doing so.

The passage of HB 2039 represents a baby step in that direction. I would urge you to vote this bill out of committee for consideration by the house.

Thank you.