

State of Kansas
House of Representatives

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Proponent Verbal Testimony HB2039 Civics Test
March 22, 2021 Senate Education Committee

Chairperson Baumgardner and Committee members. Last year, in a major survey, less than half of the people could name the three branches of government. This was an improvement over the previous Annenberg survey. Dismal. 20% of those surveyed could not name one branch.

Jefferson believed the people needed education in order to keep our fragile democracy safe. We need to understand our history, the structure our country is built on, and what part we each play in keeping democracy strong. As a high school student, I attended Boys State and that engagement and education changed my life. I learned what was possible, and what part I could play in it.

The Kansas City Star described me as a lone wolf in my effort to shine a light on the importance of Civics Education. With Attorney General Schmidt and others by my side, I feel we are becoming a wolf pack – with the goal of protecting the gift of democracy and the Constitution. We protect when we educate. Without solid ground, the structures, the branches of government, free and open elections, will crumble.

There is a movement in many states to focus on a Civics Test that is necessary for graduation. 20 states have updated their statutes to require students to learn the basic structure of our democracy. This requirement makes clear to students and the public that knowing how our system of democracy works, and what our history is, what our constitution does – these are so important that every student should be able to pass a test, like those applying to become citizens, our students should know as much and be as motivated to be part of the country. Just like math students need to learn the basic principles of multiplication in order to study physics and engineering – so all citizens need to understand the basic principles of how democracy works in order to participate for the rest of their lives.

I want to work with the Kansas State Board of Education. I respect that curriculum and standards decisions come from the State Board of Education. However, in this area, the legislature is given the task of ensuring that students are educated in Civic Government. I don't see this as a criticism of or power struggle with the State Board. This is a way of highlighting and adding to the importance of this area of study. We are all in this together; let's do what we all can to make Civic Education as important as it should be.

Therefore, I urge the Committee to vote yes to pass HB2039 favorably and do our part in encouraging and motivating Civic Involvement.

Representative Steve Huebert