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Oral Opponent Testimony on House Bill 2039

Senate Education Committee

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Madam Chair, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in opposition to House Bill 2039.

We wonder why we are now singling out young people with the assumption that they know nothing about civics, history, and government. With the number of elected officials across the nation finding themselves in hot water for ethical violations, misrepresentations of American history, racist comments, and even violations of law, perhaps we should require every candidate for elected office to pass such a test.

How about first responders? It would be nice to know that every police officer demonstrated an understanding of constitutional rights. It would perhaps be a good idea to ensure that every man or woman enlisting in our armed services has also mastered the lessons of civics, history, and government.

We admit, we were alarmed by the number of Americans, including elected officials, who fail to see that the constitution leaves managing elections to the states. We were alarmed, as I am certain all of you were, when insurrectionists invaded the United States Capitol on January 6 calling for Vice President Pence to be hung for knowing and following his constitutional duty. So yes, we do not deny that there is an apparent need for a refresher course in civics in the United States generally.

But right now, our Kansas public school students are taking civics, history, and government classes in our high schools. They are subjected to tests in those classes and, if they pass those tests, they get credit for the class. If they don't pass, they fail the class and must take it again in order to get enough credits to graduate. There is no need to legislate more in this area.

We might also remind the committee of article 6 of the Kansas constitution that leaves general supervision of our system of education to the elected State Board of Education. Legislative staff and others have often referred to this as granting the Board self-executing authority. Curriculum and standards for our schools is the responsibility of the elected State Board of Education. The Board has adopted rigorous standards for history, government, and social studies.

We would suggest that the Legislature is perfectly within its rights to make suggestions to the Board or to pass resolutions calling on the Board to consider certain actions, but that the decision rests with the State Board of Education. We would not object to the Legislature asking the Board to review this concern.

This bill is entirely unnecessary, and we would ask the committee to not pass it.