

Enlisting a New Generation of Florida Citizens

Editorials from around Florida

Miami Herald

Put civics back in the classroom

OUR OPINION: ENGAGED, INVOLVED CITIZENS ARE SOUL OF DEMOCRACY

Bob Graham, former Florida governor and U.S. senator, reached out to residents through his long-running workday program, which he began as a state lawmaker in 1974. On his very first work day, Mr. Graham taught civics at Carol City High School. Now Florida's best-known statesman wants to make sure that everyone understands how vital civics are to good government. Gov. Charlie Crist already endorses the idea. The Legislature should make it a priority this year.

Mr. Graham and former U.S. Rep. Lou Frey, an Orlando Republican, have embarked on a campaign to get the study of government back in public schools and then include civics in the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. They make a good case. Civics courses explain governments -- local, state and federal -- and the responsibilities and role of citizens in those institutions. If taught well, civics can promote participation in democracy, something in short supply in Florida, which has the nation's fourth-largest population. Consider:

- **In 2002** and 2004 Florida ranked 39th among the 50 states in voter turnout. In 2006, voter turnout statewide for the primary was 19.6 percent and just 46.8 percent in the general election when a new governor and Cabinet were selected. Each of these numbers is nearly 20 percent less than the historical turnout average between 1954 and 2004.
- **A 2005** statewide Florida Bar survey showed that more than 40 percent of Floridians could not name the three branches of U.S. government; nearly 40 percent couldn't define the concept of government checks and balances.
- **A 2005** University of Central Florida survey of more than 1,600 Central Floridians found that two-thirds of those polled couldn't name either of Florida's U.S. senators -- both of whom live in Central Florida.
- **Florida** ranks 49th among the states for its rate of volunteering.
- **The next** statistic may have a lot to do with explaining the above numbers: Among the 50 states, Florida ranks 50th in the number of residents who were born in-state.

People like to live in Florida but they sometimes leave their allegiances and civic interests "back home" in other states. And, for many immigrants, it can take time for the concept of being part of an open, free democracy to supplant the fear of taking action under a repressive government that they experienced elsewhere.

The best way to improve the state's miserable civic statistics is by teaching about government and citizen participation in public schools, say Messrs. Graham and Frey. Unless civics is included in the FCAT, they maintain, it could get short shrift in the classroom.

Their campaign is purposely timed to coincide with this year's revision of the state's social-studies standards, in advance of social studies becoming a part of the FCAT. Last year the Legislature mandated that a civics course be taught in middle school, but Messrs. Frey and Graham say that the current textbooks' civics content is "weak and nebulous" and ``teaches civics as a spectator sport rather than as a participatory sport."

They advise making college-civics courses available to student teachers and creating a core group of teachers with civics expertise to instruct others on how to engage students in the subject. Messrs. Graham and Frey want textbooks that set a "rigorous set of standards" for civics lessons and would establish a "strategic center for Florida citizenship" to support and coordinate government and citizenry education.

These are worthy goals. Alexis de Tocqueville, the 18th-century observer of America, said it best: ``The health of a democratic society may be measured by the quality of functions performed by its private citizens."

Palm Beach Post.com

Sunday, January 28, 2007

http://www.palmbeachpost.com/opinion/content/opinion/epaper/2007/01/28/a2e_civicsfcate_edit_0128.html

Learning from the FCAT

Bob Graham knows a lot about Florida, education and civics. He was governor from 1979 until 1987, served in the U.S. Senate until 2005 and has been an advocate for better public education in the state.

So when Sen. Graham says that students need more civics classes, you have to pay attention. And when he says that civics should be added to the FCAT...

Well, maybe he has a point.

Sen. Graham and former U.S. Rep. Lou Frey of Orlando, who joined him last week in pushing the Civics-FCAT notion, point out that Florida ranked 39th nationally in voter turnout and that 40 percent of Floridians can't name the three branches of government. Low turnout may explain why Florida politicians have gotten away with passing laws that have turned the FCAT into a political tool for abusing public schools.

Besides being a ploy to institute vouchers, overemphasis on the high-stakes test has driven electives and phys ed from the curriculum. Art, foreign languages and history aren't included on the test, yet the state claims that the FCAT can measure overall school quality.

Sen. Graham probably is right that, under these conditions, civics won't get taught unless civics is on the FCAT. So add it. Then, just maybe, Floridians might learn enough about government and society to elect people who will end FCAT abuse. The sooner civics is on the test, the sooner it won't need to be.

St. Petersburg Times

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Good citizens know their civics
A Times Editorial

Citizenship. It may sound like a quaint word with little more than sentimental value today, but it is still the basis of our democratic system. Justice Louis Brandeis once said that "the most important political office is that of the private citizen." Without informed and engaged citizens, our government will never reach its potential for public good. That is why a new civics initiative unveiled by former U.S. Sen. Bob Graham and former U.S. Rep. Lou Frey is such a needed and necessary step for our state.

Florida is abysmally failing to educate a ready and motivated citizenry. The statistics are so disheartening that they are barely believable. A 2005 Florida Bar poll found that more than 40 percent of the state's residents did not know the three branches of government. A poll by the University of Central Florida in 2005 found that two-thirds of respondents from Central Florida could not name either one of Florida's two U.S. senators, even though both reside in the region. And Florida ranks 49th out of 50 states in rates of volunteering.

It turns out that as Florida schools turned their focus to the basics they left civics behind. The result has been a population of civic illiterates who choose not to vote in ever larger numbers and don't bother keeping informed on issues that impact their lives.

During the last legislative session, lawmakers implicitly acknowledged this failing by making civics education mandatory in middle school. That was a start. But the plan designed by Graham and Frey would go much further and if fully implemented would set Florida's students on a path to understanding their responsibility to contribute to the nation's civic and political life.

The initiative, titled "Enlisting a New Generation of Florida Citizens," would include revising Florida's standards in civics to make it a core and comprehensive component of the Sunshine State Standards in Social Studies. A group of "super-teachers" would be enlisted to train other social studies teachers around the state, and the civics sections of textbooks would be strengthened and improved. A center would be established to coordinate and support these and other civic education efforts.

The only mildly controversial aspect of the plan is that it seeks to introduce a civics component to the FCAT. Graham and Frey insist that it is necessary in this day of "if it isn't tested it isn't taught." They believe civics will continue to receive short shrift without an assessment and accountability instrument. But adding yet another subject to the FCAT would only increase the burden these tests impose on schools. This part of the initiative deserves more careful consideration before lawmakers take the plunge.

Florida is not unique in having essentially abandoned its duty to educate the next generation of citizens. Across the country, studies show that American youths have disengaged politically. The public schools were established so that a government by the people would have responsible stewards. And it is essential that Florida's schools get back to this core mission. The plan by Graham and Frey is a solid way forward.

Orlando Sentinel

January 30, 2007

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EDITORIAL: Missing lessons

Our position: It makes sense for schools to require more knowledge of civics.

Floridians remain disconnected from their government, with fewer and fewer residents voting or volunteering in their communities.

Blame cynicism or the many distractions people face in these days of the Internet and hundreds of TV

channels, but one reason stands out above all: Ignorance.

Aside from a required middle-school course, civics education has all but vanished. Former U.S. Sen. Bob Graham and former Congressman Lou Frey want to change that. They're pushing for more civics education and for the subject to be added to the FCAT. And for good reason. Right now more than 40 percent of Floridians can't name the three branches of government, or understand the concept of "checks and balances."

For people to get involved, they first need to understand what they're getting involved in.

Tampa Tribune

<http://www.tbo.com/news/opinion/editorials/MGBLW4DJXE.html>

January 30, 2007

Educate Floridians To Be Better Citizens

It might cost \$7 million to elevate and improve the teaching of civics in Florida, a small price to pay considering the cost of being clueless.

Consider that Floridians vote far less than citizens in other states, ranking 39th in average turnout in the 2002 and 2004 elections. We're the fourth largest state, but rank an embarrassing 49th in the rates of volunteerism. Nine out of 10 college-age students in one central Florida survey could name neither of the state's U.S. senators - who happen to be from central Florida.

Two of the state's more distinguished public servants, former U.S. Sen. Bob Graham and former Rep. Lou Frey, have mounted a new campaign to advance the cause of civics education in Florida by asking Gov. Charlie Crist and state lawmakers to provide funding to train new civics teachers. They want the state's curriculum standards to be rewritten to put more emphasis on civics. And they want to see civics on the FCAT.

The two statesmen have gone to Tallahassee armed with a long list of examples of Floridians' shortcomings in civics education. Tallahassee should not only embrace this effort by investing this modest amount of financial resources, but also reinforce what's taught in schools by creating an open, inclusive government that helps people to become involved.

We don't always get the government we deserve, and Graham is right that the way civics is taught in Florida schools encourages students to be spectators to a political process rather than participants. Florida is too big of a state with too much at stake for its citizens to not be playing active roles in public life.

Granted, government by itself can only do so much to instill a sense of civic responsibility. Most of those who dedicate themselves to public service came to be interested in civics sitting at the family

dinner table or accompanying their parents to political events. But the state's pitiful volunteerism rate suggests something is amiss.

Florida can do better, and reviving interest in civics is a good place to start.

Daytona Beach News Journal (Editorial Staff)

February 4, 2007

http://www.news-journalonline.com/NewsJournalOnline/Opinion/Editorials/opnOP_N06020407.htm

Democracy in jeopardy? Knowledge is core of good government

It's not so much that most central Floridians, young and old, can't name their two U.S. senators. It's not even that four in 10 Floridians can't name the three branches of government or explain the basic concept of checks and balances. Or that Florida's Advanced Placement high school graduates know less about civics and American history than their counterparts in every other comparable state. It's that such ignorance, and the lethargy that perpetuates it, show up, generation after generation, in Florida's embarrassing rankings among states in citizen volunteerism (currently 48th), in voter turnout (currently 39th) and in the misery of people whose lives would be made better through the sound policies and benevolent actions of a more informed and engaged citizenry.

The dark side of the Sunshine State is that it is a state of dropouts. Too many people come here to idle away their remaining years gated from the world. Too many more are born here never to take interest in improving on their birthright. And few of those who are schooled here gain even a functional knowledge of their government, political history or the mechanics of citizenship. For Florida's sake, it's time we change that at the most fundamental levels.

Early last year, the Florida Bar Association launched an initiative to mandate a year of civics education for middle-school students. The goal was commendable -- to help build what then Bar President Alan Bookman described as "new generations of active citizens who know enough about democratic principles to defend and protect them." But state education leaders and lawmakers weren't sure the abrupt and singular change in curriculum would be the most effective way to achieve the goal. Since then, former U.S. Sen. Bob Graham and former U.S. Rep. Lou Frey, along with experts in social studies curriculum and others, took on the mission for a broader solution. Their recommendations, announced last month, are sensible, more comprehensive than the initial Bar proposal and deserve sober consideration by the governor, legislators, education leaders and parents.

They point out that Florida schools devote little classroom time to the study of history, government, economics and geography, less than two hours per week in two-thirds of the state's elementary school classrooms. In fact, these social studies comprise the only major core subject area excluded from

the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, by which student, teacher and school progress are measured and rewarded. That should change.

Graham and Frey propose adding social studies, particularly civics, to the FCAT. We concur, but with the caveat that the test only be used as one diagnostic tool within a broader assessment of student progress. More importantly, Graham and Frey call for revising educational standards to make civics instruction an integral part of the public school curriculum and an essential component of teacher education at Florida's colleges and universities. Similarly, they suggest a review of and improvements to textbooks and other instructional materials to aid the effort. And they suggest establishing and perpetually funding a Center for Florida Citizenship to track civics culture and coordinate independent efforts to increase civics education by public policy centers, schools, local governments and other entities.

It would seem prudent also to develop an introductory civics course at the elementary school level, a more comprehensive course in middle school and if not a specific course in high school at least a deliberate infusion of civics discussions within other classwork. Public education should inspire a keen awareness among young Floridians of their responsibilities and opportunities as citizens to effect a stronger republic and a better community. As author Elizabeth Hollander put it, "A generation that acquires knowledge without ever understanding how that knowledge can benefit the community is a generation that is not learning what it means to be citizens in a democracy." She could have been talking about Florida today. Let us join Graham, Frey and others in changing that.

Lack of Engagement

These numbers tell a troubling story about Floridians' lack of engagement with civic leaders, institutions and culture:

39th

Florida's rank in average voter turnout for the 2002 and 2004 general elections.

46.8%

of Florida's population turned out for the November 2006 general election.

19.6%

of Florida's population turned out for the September 2006 primary election.

4th

Florida's rank in population.

49th

Florida's rank in volunteering

40%

of Floridians could not correctly identify the three branches of American government -- and nearly 40% could not define the concept of "checks and balances" -- according to a 2005 statewide Florida Bar survey.

SOURCE: Bob Graham and Lou Frey report, 'Enlisting a New Generation of Florida Citizens'

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Ravaging path to well-rounded education

FCAT, that towering titan that controls public education is wiping out history, civics and geography. And as Godzilla promoters might say: "The fate is in your hands."

We have known for years that the monster tests have gotten out of control. Instead of state standards guiding education, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test does. School districts spend thousands of dollars on software programs to help improve test scores. Teachers train to improve FCAT scores. Students who don't pass the tests are routed into summer schools and after-school programs. Teachers and administrators get raises when test scores go up. Schools get bonus dollars.

But is instilling FCAT fear into schoolchildren giving them a better education?

Consider what the high-stakes test has done to humanities: A new study shows that more than 61 percent of elementary-school pupils in a random questionnaire said they have reduced social studies instruction since the beginning of FCAT exams in 1998 -- some dramatically (see box at right).

Doing well in science, math and language arts (reading and writing) is good. But students are being shortchanged on other subjects and educational experiences. What has been achieved, for example, if a student performs well in technology but can't identify where China or India is? Or can't speak foreign languages in a competitive global economy? What about the need for physical education or music or even recess?

And this year, the FCAT bar has been raised. Science scores and learning gains for the lowest-achieving students in math will be calculated into overall school scores -- adding to the pressure to teach primarily to the test. (This is FCAT crunch time: Testing began last week and will go on through March 9.)

Last month, Gov. Charlie Crist hinted that changes were on the way. But the results are disappointing. True, the state Education Department is revamping FCAT -- but only so far as science, math and language arts go. The department says it may even consider a new name for the test (as if that change could make the test more viable for students).

The governor says he wants to change the state's teacher-performance pay plan to reduce FCAT influence, but the schools' options remain unchanged. He says he wants to change the way schools are graded, but FCAT is still the heavy as the now-tougher standards are implemented.

Crist's choices for the State Board of Education are telling: Subject to Senate confirmation, they are T. Willard Fair, (a reappointment) who has championed Florida's style of high-stakes testing, and Akshay Desai, president of Universal Healthcare, whose stance on FCAT is unknown but who has ties to former Gov. Jeb Bush (he was named by Bush to the state Board of Governors, which oversees the university system). This suggests major changes on FCAT are unlikely.

The governor seems to aim for tweaking when the whole premise of FCAT needs trouncing. A myopic punitive assessment system doesn't educate well-rounded students ready for global challenges. To tame the FCAT monster, people have to start speaking up.

To contact Gov. Crist, e-mail him at charlie.crist@myflorida.com or write him at The Capitol, 400 S. Monroe St., Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001.

What FCAT Has Devoured

A December survey commissioned by the Florida Association of Social Studies Supervisors questioned elementary-school teachers about the effect that the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test has on instruction for nontested social studies subjects, such as history, geography, communities, citizenship and world relationships.

Conducted by Stetson University's Patrick Coggins, the study suggests that, due to FCAT preparation time, fewer hours are spent on non-FCAT subjects. Based on answers from the 1,766 teachers in nine districts (including Volusia County), the findings show:

- About 61 percent of these teachers reported that social studies instruction has declined in their classrooms since the beginning of FCAT testing in 1998. Only about 10 percent said that there was no decline.
- More than 67 percent spent less than 2 hours each week in social studies instruction while more than 32 spent 3-5 hours. In comparison, a minimum of 7.5 hours is spent on reading, 5 hours on math and 4 hours on science.
- About 73 percent of the respondents reported that they affirmatively reduced social studies instruction by 1-2 hours while about 18 percent reported a reduction of 3-4 hours a week. This data suggest that about 92 percent of the respondents agreed that social studies instruction time has been substantially reduced in order to focus on FCAT preparation for the language arts (reading and writing), math and science.

TC Palm

February 2, 2007

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Editorial: Florida needs a civics lesson

If representative government depends on an engaged, informed citizenry, Florida's in big trouble. Note:

- Florida ranked 39th in voter turnout in 2002 and 2004 elections.
- A survey of 1,600 Central Floridians found that two-thirds of them could not name either of the state's U.S. senators (both of whom reside in Central Florida).
- 40 percent of Floridians could not identify the three branches of American government.

These and other stupefying statistics highlight a knowledge deficit that bodes ill for democracy. Corruption, collusion and the seeds of dictatorship flourish in a vacuum of ignorance and apathy.

Fortunately, Bob Graham, a former Florida governor and U.S. senator who knows a thing or two about government, has a plan to raise this state's collective consciousness, starting at its schools.

Launching a bipartisan education initiative with former U.S. Rep. Louis Frey, R-Orlando, Graham is determined to get meaningful civics instruction back into the classroom via an initiative called "Enlisting a New Generation of Florida Citizens."

To bolster the curriculum, the Miami Democrat wants civics to be broadened, deepened and included in both the Sunshine State Standards and the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. He also calls for teachers to be properly trained in the subject.

These ideas are key to a well-rounded education. And as the nation's fourth biggest state, Florida can leverage its clout to demand that textbook companies deliver the goods.

"Florida's current learning standards treat civics as an afterthought," Graham observes. "Even the best and brightest civics students lag behind students in other states."

Graham, who envisions establishing a Center for Florida Citizenship, deserves the support of lawmakers and educators alike in his campaign to reinvigorate civics education. Today's 2.6 million public-school students are Florida's future — and they deserve a quality, civic-minded curriculum to equip them with the tools of citizenship.

Beyond classroom instruction, adults ought to lead by example.

Parents can practice what Graham preaches by spending less time in front of the boob tube and more time studying the issues with their children and, of course, voting at every election.

Elected officials can do much to curb the rampant cynicism that infects the body politic by demonstrating they are fiscally responsible stewards of the public trust — not repositories of special-interest cash.

Anemic voter turnout and slipping party registration are direct byproducts of Republican-Democrat gamesmanship that too often passes for government "policy." Come to think of it, politicians could benefit from a good civics lesson themselves.

Ocala.com

February 21, 2007

OUR OPINION: A civics lesson we need

For all the blather emanating from Washington about America's mission to spread democracy around the globe, a new report shows, in startling fashion, just how little Floridians actually know about the concept or participate in it. Thankfully, an effort is under way to save us from our ignorance and apathy. The document, "Enlisting a New Generation of Florida Citizens," is a project of former U.S. Sen. Bob Graham and former U.S. Rep. Lou Frey, who have launched a movement to boost civics education in Florida's public schools. Policymakers in public education should heed the results.

Why? Consider these tidbits cited by Graham, a Democrat affiliated with the Bob Graham Center for Public Service at the University of Florida, and Frey, a Republican who founded the University of Central Florida's Lou Frey Institute of Politics and Government:

Florida, the nation's fourth largest state, ranked 39th in voter turnout in the 2002 and '04 general elections. In last fall's election, arguably the most critical in nearly a generation, voter turnout was down nearly 20 percent from the historical average for 1954 to 2004;

A 2006 UCF survey of 1,600 Central Florida residents found that two-thirds of those polled could not identify either of Florida's two U.S. senators, even though both hail from that region;

A Florida Bar study in 2005 discovered that 41 percent of state residents could not identify all three branches of government, while nearly 40 percent failed to understand the concept of "checks and balances."

Graham and Frey fear most for our children, as educators, in the drive to appease the gods administering the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, or FCAT, have sacrificed social studies - including government, politics, economics and geography - for math, reading and science. (Social studies is not tested as part of FCAT.)

And even when social studies is taught, they write, state education standards emphasize only the basics without expanding the topic to instill more complex concepts and knowledge. "Put another way, our schools teach civics as a spectator sport rather than as a participatory sport," Graham and Frey argue.

Chris Sandy, executive director of elementary education for Marion County Public Schools, sees how they reach that conclusion. But she counters that while social studies is not part of the FCAT instruction, an FCAT-based curriculum for social studies exists, and Marion County's teachers do a solid job of injecting civics and related subjects into the school day within the parameters mandated by the need to teach other testable subjects.

"Since civics is not part of the test, and not part of a school grade, something is going to have to give," Sandy told us. Still, she adds, "We cannot use the lack of time as an excuse. We've got to find a way. If not, who's going to pass that heritage and knowledge on?"

Which is exactly what Graham and Frey are pushing for. And while they believe public schools are the main culprits for the decline of civic participation and interest, especially among our young, the schools can also be the saviors.

Graham and Frey recommend making civics an "integral" part of public education and further encourage doing that by ensuring it is part of the curriculum in training teachers at Florida's colleges and universities. They also want to implement civics as part of FCAT, update and improve textbooks with a new emphasis on civics, establish a "strategic center" to coordinate these efforts and monitor Florida's "civic health."

This will be challenging. But if want to understand why we must meet it, consider Sandy's point about heritage.

Graham and Frey note that Florida is dead last in the U.S. regarding the percentage of its population being born within the state, while we rank fourth in the U.S. in terms of the size of our foreign-born population, with almost 25 percent of state residents speaking a language other than English at home. And in a given year, 14 percent of Floridians move to another part of the state. When combined, those ingredients are the recipe for civic disengagement and cultural dysfunction.

"The nation which reposes on the pillow of political confidence, will sooner or later end its political existence in a deadly lethargy," James Madison once observed. It's time to revitalize civics, otherwise we ignore Graham and Frey at our own peril.

Experts

By Mark R. Howard - 3/1/2007

My daughter, a high school sophomore, came to me recently with a question. She was hesitant to ask, she said, but she realized as she studied for her American history class that she didn't understand the basic divisions among the three branches of government. Her textbook had referred to an important Supreme Court case, and she wasn't sure exactly how the court fit in the American system.

"I feel like I already ought to know how government works," she said, "but they've never taught us about it in school." She was much more sheepish about asking than I was surprised that she didn't know. Later in our talk, she added that "I think if you asked the kids in my class how a bill becomes law, almost nobody would know."

She's almost certainly right. Advanced Placement test scores in government and history by Florida high school students indicate that Florida's AP students -- presumably the best -- know "less about civics and U.S. history than students in virtually every other comparable state." The quote is from a report that's part of an initiative launched by former Gov. and U.S. Sen. Bob Graham and former U.S. Rep. Lou Frey. They want the state to require public schools to teach and test civics, and they want to establish and fund a center to support and coordinate civics education in Florida.

Civics issues in Florida don't start and end with our children, of course. A report by the National Conference on Citizenship places Florida 49th among the states in rates of volunteering. Meanwhile, in 2005, the Florida Bar found that four out of 10 Florida adults couldn't identify the three branches of American government and that fewer than half could correctly describe the meaning of "separation of powers." And despite the pivotal role Florida has played in the last two presidential elections, turnout rates for even the highest profile races are poor -- less than 50% in last November's election and less than 20% in the September primary. Many Floridians, polls reflect, can't identify the state's two senators, much less the local officials whose impact on their lives may be much more immediate.

And if poor voter participation mirrors a civics deficit, I think it's also reflected in what could be called plebiscite creep. There seems to be a growing inclination by both citizens groups and business interests to leapfrog the challenges of day-to-day representative democracy and boil big, complex issues down to a single, structural change in the state's constitution that's supposed to, with one fell swoop, fix a perceived problem once and for all.

Conventional wisdom has it that amendments like Save Our Homes, the bullet train, class size and the proposed, misguided Hometown Democracy amendment reflect righteous frustration with unresponsive legislators. In that context, big referendums are seen as, by definition, more "democratic."

Another view may be that they just reflect impatience and a certain amount of ignorance about the level of civic engagement and attention-paying it takes to make government work well. Democracy, at some level, ought to be slow and messy. Most progress won't come from some quick-fix piece of top-down legislation or constitutional amendment, but rather from what journalist and consultant Otis White calls a "web of collaborations, with many publics and many privates involved," at the local and regional levels.

An inclination toward push-button solutions takes the burden off of citizens to stay engaged and takes the burden off of their elected officials to keep advancing the ball. Despite all the gerrymandered districts drawn to keep incumbents safe, I still believe it's possible to throw the bums out if they're not getting the job done, and the results from the November election tell me it's still possible.

The Graham-Frey report is right in looking to the education of the younger generation as the key to building a more engaged citizenry over time. The Legislature now mandates a semester's worth of civics in middle school, but the state standards, Graham-Frey points out, focus only on the first component of citizenship education -- knowledge of names, dates and facts. The report recommends that civics instruction also address participatory skills; in other words, provide children some practice in being citizens. It calls for improving textbooks and making sure teacher certification includes integrating citizenship instruction into educators' roles.

I'm always hesitant to advocate asking more from an education system that's been burdened with too many roles as it is, but teaching children how to be good, involved Americans is every bit as important as imparting the math and verbal skills it takes to function in a world economy. As Graham-Frey points out, "When citizens do not comprehend who makes public decisions, don't understand the process by which decisions are made and can't comprehend the basic structure of government, the notion of trying to solve a personal issue or seeking to address a community problem must seem to be a distant reality."

A colleague here at Trend recently had to report for jury duty. Among the jury pool, she says, was a young man clearly uncomfortable at the notion of serving. He said he didn't understand why he was there, asking her, "Shouldn't they have a group of experts just decide these cases?" Nowhere, it seems, in his education had it been communicated to him that the ultimate genius of the American system is that it makes us, the citizens, the experts. We make the important calls.

TampaBayOnline

March 4, 2007

State Lawmakers Raise Audacious Expectations

The Legislature convenes Tuesday in Tallahassee where an open-minded governor and revolutionary ideas about taxes herald a session of bold - perhaps reckless - change.

Personable leaders have created fertile ground for ideas to sprout, ideas that in recent years would never have seen daylight. The companionable attitude has raised expectations of a session capable of historic changes.

The choices may be tougher than expected if revenue estimates continue to reflect a slowing state economy. But at this point, the mood is upbeat. No longer is Jeb Bush enforcing his agenda. New Gov. Charlie Crist is brimming with fresh proposals, but remains open to other ideas and they are arriving faster than they can be analysed. The political wind these days feels more like a whirlwind.

Whose ideas will land on top is, as the session begins, anyone's guess. Much is at stake, especially in insurance, education, and health care, but the top priority is taxes.

Taxes

Property owners have demanded relief from taxes that have increased with the surge in property values. There is widespread outrage that local governments have raked in more revenue than needed.

Everyone agrees major tax cuts are coming. The danger is that the most sensational, not the best, plan might gain enough momentum to pass.

The governor suggests a higher homestead exemption, a tax rollback and making portable the Save Our Homes cap on values. Before his plan could sink in, the House leadership countered with a more dramatic concept of killing all property taxes on owner-occupied homes and adding a higher tax on sales.

Crist amiably agreed that the radical change was worth considering. Lawmakers should slow down. Much is unknown about the House plan, including the unwritten formula to divide sales tax revenues among cities, counties and taxing districts.

Under the House plan, the revenue lost by eliminating property taxes would be replaced by adding 2.5 cents to the 6-cents-per-dollar state sales tax. The owner of an average house would save \$2,000 in property taxes. That same owner would have to spend \$80,000 on taxable goods to pay more in taxes.

The more valuable your house, the better the House plan is for you. Homeowners would have more money to spend, but governments would have less money for police protection, road construction, libraries and parks.

The change would force local governments to tighten their belts, a good thing considering the fast increase in property values over the past few years. But no matter how you figure it, local governments would be put on a crash diet at the same time many wealthy folks would owe next to nothing for local government services. It should be a top priority of cities and counties to figure out what would have to be cut and to make sure the public understands the local price of big tax savings.

House Speaker Marco Rubio of Miami, who at age 35 has more courage than experience, assumes that a fair formula can be written to share the sales tax revenue. But he can't say how.

Still, Rubio was brave to toss his plan into the air to give everyone a shot at it before the session opens.

And it has been quite a shooting gallery. Bang - do you give inefficient, high-tax towns the same revenue as thrifty, low-tax towns? Bang - why should Rush Limbaugh save more than \$400,000 in property taxes while the tax bill of a low-income renter might well increase? And bang - how do we pay police and fire fighters when sales slow during a recession?

Other ideas, especially the package of tax-cut proposals offered by Hillsborough Property Appraiser Rob Turner, appear brilliant in contrast. Much pressure is on the Senate, which has been doing more listening than talking, to slow things down and come up with a viable compromise.

Insurance

The Legislature's second-highest priority is property insurance. This issue would take first place had lawmakers not held a special session in January to address voter discontent.

After eight storms hit Florida in two hurricane seasons, owners of homes and businesses saw huge hikes in property insurance premiums. Many lost coverage altogether, especially near the coast, as companies pulled out of the market.

To give homeowners relief, lawmakers gambled the state's financial security in the hope that a once-in-a-century storm like Andrew or Katrina won't strike anytime soon. They promised that the state's catastrophe fund would pay a bigger part of the damage.

If a catastrophic storm hits before the fund builds up reserves, the state would likely issue bonds to cover the damage. Policyholders statewide would pay substantial assessments to repay the debt.

Still, home and commercial property owners in Hillsborough should see property insurance savings of about 21 percent on policies renewed after June 1. Pinellas residents can expect average savings of about 30 percent, while some homeowners in South Florida could see their rates cut in half. The special session was a success, but only the first step to taming the market.

Ultimately, the only way to permanently lower insurance rates is to make the damage caused by hurricanes less expensive. The state must encourage owners to strengthen homes and businesses. Lawmakers have promised - and must - fund mitigation programs to induce homeowners to better defend their property from hurricanes. Speaker Rubio says a rating system is being developed to assess the strength of homes. A homeowner's premium would be tied to that rating.

Another important issue is whether the state should continue to allow insurance companies to create Florida-only offshoots. These so-called "pup companies" - formed to insulate parent companies from losses in Florida - have been allowed here since 1996.

Allowing companies to divide their risk lured insurers back to the state after the shocking damage of Hurricane Andrew. But Gov. Crist calls the practice "a shell game" because pup companies can claim losses, and get higher rates, in one state even as the parent makes substantial profits nationwide. Lawmakers will be tempted to go after the deeper pockets of the parent company, but they shouldn't. Prohibiting pups like Allstate Floridian would keep insurers from writing policies here because it would require them to put all of their assets at risk.

The Legislature should lend its stature to Crist's effort to establish a national catastrophe fund. Even though Washington politicians lack the political will to act, Sen. Christopher Dodd, D-Conn., a

presidential contender, has promised to hold hearings on the idea. State lawmakers, as well as the congressional delegation, should get behind the effort.

Health And Social Services

Most social services groups need state aid for a variety of reasons, but in tight budget years they are usually the first to be cut.

The Homeless Coalition of Hillsborough County is asking for \$4 million to build a centralized homeless service center that would also provide 200 emergency beds. Most of the county's homeless are families who need only temporary aid to get back on their feet. This is a cause that Hillsborough's delegation should strongly support.

Another worthy cause that demands more funding is Florida's Healthy Start program, which seeks to decrease the state's dismal infant mortality rate with specialized services for pregnant women. After years of budgetary neglect, lawmakers boosted Healthy Start's funding to \$57.6 million last year. However, leaders are requesting another \$37.5 million over the next five years to meet the projected demand.

The infant mortality rate among black infants needs special focus. At 18.8 deaths for every 1,000 live births, the death rate for black babies is about three times higher than for whites. Legislative leaders could help address the racial disparities in infant deaths by funding better prenatal care. Giving proper care to a client of Healthy Start costs the state just \$566, but caring for one premature baby costs \$500,000.

On another front, the governor is seeking \$20 million to create a stem-cell research grant, and lawmakers should follow his lead. The grant would support research within the parameters of the federal law, including adult stem cells, umbilical cord blood and placental stem cells. It would not fund research on embryonic stem cells except for the lines permissible under federal law.

The Legislature also should make it a priority to solve the problems apparent in the state's emergency rooms - overcrowding, long waits, the nursing shortage, the lack of on-call physicians.

Education

Former Gov. Bush dominated the education agenda and gave lawmakers strict marching orders. Now, they have more freedom and seem unsure what to do with it. Crist's education plan builds on Bush's success in school accountability and achievement, but wisely aims to take some of the vitriol out of the debate over public schools.

Teacher merit pay will likely produce the hottest education debate in the session. Crist has proposed spending \$295 million to give 10-percent bonuses to the top 25 percent of teachers in each school. Unlike Bush's maligned bonus program, which is tightly linked to FCAT scores, Crist would allow principals to decide who gets the bonuses based on performance reviews and student achievement.

Crist's adjustment is a reasonable response to concerns that the bonus program would penalize those who teach the most challenging students. His plan preserves an important policy that Florida wants bigger paychecks for the best teachers. Those who would do away with merit pay and treat all teachers the same do no favors for teachers whose students show demonstrable achievement. Money is a

powerful motivator, and while Florida needs to pay all teachers well, it should make sure that those who do the best work are most rewarded.

On math and science, Rubio is rightly raising the issue of a tougher curriculum. Florida's standards, education experts say, pale in comparison to standards in leading nations, such as Singapore. Crist had already taken the first step toward rethinking how Florida schools teach math and science with the recent unveiling of the Office for Math and Science, headed by Noble laureate Sir Harold Kroto. A recent report from the Koret Task Force, one of the nation's leading think tanks on education reforms, said curriculum reform is a logical step for improving the quality of public education in Florida.

Another good proposal is to push back FCAT testing to March. The change would give students more time to complete the material they need to learn during the school year. The current FCAT schedule rushes teachers and doesn't give them time for remedial lessons.

A new civics education proposal from retired Sen. Bob Graham and former Rep. Lou Frey also should be backed by the House and Senate. And Crist's proposal to make recess mandatory for elementary school students could go a long way in combating childhood obesity.

Transportation

The highest transportation priority of the Hillsborough County delegation should be the creation of a regional transportation authority. Different bills have been introduced in the House and Senate to form a new agency that could build and operate transit and toll roads in the seven counties from Citrus to Sarasota. The agency is needed, but it must not be allowed to dictate to cities and counties where growth will occur. And it must not replace the Tampa-Hillsborough Expressway Authority, which focuses on the needs of this urban area.

Environment

The top environmental priority for lawmakers should be to preserve more environmentally significant land. Spending more money now, while the real estate market is sluggish, would allow taxpayers to get more acres for their money.

An increase is long overdue. Although the land prices have skyrocketed, the annual \$300 million allocation has not increased since the visionary Preservation 2000 program was launched in 1990 by former Gov. Bob Martinez.

Moreover, when the program was renewed as Florida Forever in 1999, lawmakers decided to use some of the money for urban parks and water resources. While these are appropriate expenditures, the change limited the funds available for buying conservation lands.

Saving Florida's wilderness is a good deal for taxpayers. It furnishes critical wildlife habitat, filters water, prevents flooding and provides places for citizens to hike, canoe, camp and otherwise enjoy the outdoors. Buying land also can avert costly growth problems without burdensome regulations or costly litigation.

Gov. Crist proposes spending \$400 million in the upcoming year on land acquisition, a good move. Even better is Sen. Burt Saunders' plan to spend \$600 million.

Another important proposal would increase funding for the cleanup of Lake Okeechobee, whose polluted waters are discharged into canals that deliver contaminants to the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean. Lawmakers should commit to saving the state's largest lake, a key component of the vast Everglades system. Part of the fix will include capturing and treating the tainted runoff from developments north of the lake.

TampaBayOnline

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Reporter Jerome R. Stockfish can be reached at (850) 222-8382 or jstockfish@tampatrib.com.

Ex-Lawmakers Sound Alarm: Florida Has Civics Deficiency

By JEROME R. STOCKFISCH The Tampa Tribune

TALLAHASSEE - Less than 20 percent of the state's voters turned out for the September primary election.

Forty percent of Floridians can neither name the three branches of government nor comprehend the concept of checks and balances.

In a recent poll in Central Florida, two-thirds of respondents couldn't name either of the state's U.S. senators - although both live there.

Reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic may be well and good for students, but a pair of Florida elder statesmen warned lawmakers on Wednesday that state schools need to teach good old-fashioned civics before an entire generation is lost to their responsibilities in a democracy.

"This is a very important issue," said Bob Graham, an 18-year U.S. senator and two-term governor from Miami Lakes. "Our democracy depends today, as it has from the beginning, on an educated citizenry prepared to be participants."

That citizenry is being shortchanged by the lack of civics education in public schools, he said.

Graham and Lou Frey, who represented Central Florida in the U.S. House for 10 years, are pushing a bipartisan initiative to make civics an integral part of the public school curriculum.

They want to take the opportunity of this July's mandated review of the Sunshine State Standards for public education to emphasize civics and have the subject included on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test.

The testing aspect is important, said Graham and Frey, because with the current FCAT focus on reading, writing, math and science, civics will continue to fall through the cracks unless it is elevated to one of those key subjects.

The state Senate's Committee on Education Pre-K-12 concurred, unanimously passing Senate Bill 1234, sponsored by Sen. Don Gaetz, R-Niceville. Gov. Charlie Crist also is onboard, having recommended \$8 million in state funding for the initiative.

The bill does not have a House companion. That didn't appear to be daunting to Graham, a Democrat, and Frey, a Republican, who are respected figures in Tallahassee and drew applause after their testimony Wednesday.

"It truly is staggering when you think of where we are," Frey told the lawmakers. "We don't have all the answers. We're struggling to try and find them. We can work our way out of this mess. It won't be overnight - we have to start now, though."

The Up-Coming Op-Ed Appeared in the Following News Outlets:

Orlando Sentinel

February 4, 2007

U.S. Sen. Bob Graham and U.S. Rep. Lou Frey Special to the Sentinel

Sun Sentinel

February 9, 2007

Enlist new generation of Florida citizens

Ft Meyers News Press

February 21, 2007

Make room for civics education

Ocala.Com

February 25, 2007

FOCUS ON FLORIDA: Time to enlist a new generation of Florida citizens

Imagine living in a state where nearly 75 percent of public school students reach the 4th grade without being able to identify the Constitution as the document that sets basic federal government rules.

Ninety-one percent of students reach the 12th grade without being able to explain two ways that citizen participation in the political process benefits democracy. More than 40 percent of the entire population cannot identify the three branches of government. Less than 20 percent of voters bothered to turn out in a recent primary election to choose nominees for governor and the U.S. Senate. The state ranks 39th in

average voter turnout and 49th in volunteering.

Sadly, these numbers are not a figment of the imagination but a reality of nightmarish proportions here in Florida. They suggest two disturbing trends: that many Floridians are not motivated to participate in our state's civic life, and that even if they had the necessary desire, many Floridians would not know where or how to begin.

Unfortunately, our state dramatically under-utilizes the one institution capable of building civic virtue, our public school system. Several months ago, we assembled a bipartisan working group of educators and policymakers to identify and recommend solutions to Florida's civics education problems. Recently, we met with the governor and key state legislative leaders to present our five-part civics education initiative.

- First, Florida must make civics an integral part of the school curriculum. Right now, schools spend relatively little classroom time focusing on social studies like history, government, economics, and geography. Even when civics-related subjects are taught, Florida's Sunshine State educational standards emphasize basic knowledge — learning names, dates, and other facts — over the development of higher-level skills such as civic participation. We should use the scheduled 2007 revision of the Sunshine State Standards to update civics guidelines so that students learn all of the skills they need to be effective citizens.
- Second, civics knowledge and skills should be tested on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Like it or not, the reality of the FCAT is that subjects which are tested are taught. At present, Florida students are held accountable via testing for their achievements in reading, writing, mathematics, and even science — in short, every core academic subject but civics. Without assessment and accountability, civics will remain under-emphasized.
- Third, we need to empower educators who teach civics in Florida's public schools. Since students will not be transformed into active citizens without teachers who are properly trained, it is critical that we make civics instruction an essential discipline at the 33 Florida colleges and universities that offer certified teacher education. We must also help those teachers already in the classroom enhance their civics teaching skills and methods.
- Fourth, Florida should lead the nation in textbook improvement. We have reason to be concerned about the quality of civics textbooks in Florida and across the country. Our educational policymakers must update academic standards, build instructional coalitions with other states, and review our own textbook selection process to ensure that students have the right learning tools.
- Fifth, we propose to establish a strategic center for Florida citizenship. For years, those students, parents, educators, elected officials, public policy centers and advocacy organizations that are committed to transforming our students from children to citizens have often been on their own. A strategic citizenship center would support and help coordinate their efforts, monitor Florida's civic health, and keep us on track to produce educated and effective citizens.

In eulogizing Gerald Ford, former NBC news anchor Tom Brokaw described the late president as a key

member of the "Greatest Generation," a group of Americans which, in Brokaw's words, was "accustomed to difficult missions, shaped by the sacrifices and the deprivations of the Great Depression, a generation that gave up its innocence and youth to then win a great war and save the world."

But, as Brokaw noted, what best defined that generation was its commitment to citizenship. When the Greatest Generation won World War II, they could have rested but instead "re-enlisted as citizens and set out to serve their country in new ways, with political differences but always with the common goal of doing what's best for the nation and all the people." Floridians who care about serving our state and doing what is best for its people have a similar mission — to enlist Florida's youngest generation as informed citizens who not only vote but also play active roles in shaping our government, building our communities, and securing our future.

— Former Gov. and U.S. Sen. Bob Graham, a Democrat, is the founder of the Bob Graham Center for Public Service at the University of Florida and University of Miami. Former congressman Lou Frey, a Republican, is the founder of the Lou Frey Institute for Politics and Government at the University of Central Florida.

Daytona Beach News Journal

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http://www.news-journalonline.com/NewsJournalOnline/Opinion/Editorials/opnOP_N07020407.htm

Policymakers fail test on civics

By JASON CAROS
FLORIDA VOICE

“One of the highest and most valuable objects to which the influence of a school can be made conducive consists in training our children in self-government.”

-- Horace Mann

For a number of years now educators across America have been engaged in a concentrated effort to improve student reading proficiency, and rightly so. Reading is a gateway to the acquisition of knowledge and attainment of student success. Educators and policymakers must continue to focus their efforts in this area; however, they must simultaneously work in earnest to bolster another type of student literacy -- civic literacy.

Civics refers to the preparation students receive in order to understand and appreciate the important rights and responsibilities they have as citizens of the United States. Civic instruction has been, since the beginning of our history, an educational priority as recorded by George Washington in his final State of the Union address in 1796: "A primary object . . . should be the education of our youth in the science of government. In a republic, what species of knowledge can be equally important? And what duty more pressing . . . than communicating it to those who are guardians of the liberties of the country?"

Is civics a priority today? Civic preparation should be fostered throughout a student's education and in a variety of classes but the predominant place for this instruction is in the area of social studies where students learn history, civics and government, geography and economics.

In a recent survey report produced by The Florida Association of Social Studies Supervisors and prepared by Dr. Patrick Coggins of Stetson University, approximately 1,800 elementary teachers from around the state were polled about Social Studies instruction and it was found that 68 percent teach social studies for two hours or less per week and only 2.5 percent teach social studies five hours per week (compare this to 7.5 hours of weekly required reading instruction). What does this mean for the "experiment in democracy" we call The United States?

De-emphasizing civics and history at the elementary level has important ramifications. Civics instruction in the elementary grades involves essential foundational learning. In order for students to acquire the civic skills and dispositions commensurate with a responsible citizenry they must first absorb essential civic knowledge. If neglected in the elementary grades, civic education begins at the secondary level in a remedial manner, often times preventing students from completing the step-by-step process that should culminate in high school with students engaging in more advanced civic discourse and activity.

This lack of instruction and learning contributes to the general civic ignorance and apathy prevalent in our culture today. It is obvious to anyone who has eyes that many Americans have no clue about the most fundamental historical knowledge or principles our nation was founded on. Connected to this is the fact that civic participation is strikingly low. For example, in the results of the most recent national assessment of U.S. students on history and civics, via a test called the National Assessment of Educational Progress, it was found that 73 percent of fourth-graders could not identify the Constitution from among four choices as "the document that contains the basic rules used to run the United States government." Ninety-four percent of students in eighth grade could not give two reasons why it can be useful for a country to have a constitution; and 91 percent of students in grade 12 were unable to explain two ways that democratic society benefits from citizens actively participating in the political process.

In a 2005 University of Central Florida survey of more than 1,600 central Floridians, two-thirds of respondents could not name our state's two U.S. senators, both of whom reside in Central Florida, and Florida's voter turnout for the 2006 general election was a disappointing 46.8 percent, about 20 percent less than the average between 1954 and 2004.

When looking at statistics of youth participation in voting at the national level, one will find that voting among 18- to 24-year-olds has decreased 12 percentage points since the 1970s, and in comparison to the

rest of the industrialized and democratic world, the United States has the lowest voter turnout of all nations.

It should go without saying that civic education is at the heart of democratic instructional endeavors. The reality is, though, that civics needs resuscitation at the elementary level and therapy at the secondary level. We have many wonderful teachers at all levels fighting the good fight, but there are too many gaps in our current system.

In a bipartisan effort to help improve civic education in Florida, former U.S. Sen. Bob Graham and former U.S. Rep. Lou Frey recently presented Gov. Charlie Crist, state legislators, members of the Department of Education and educational organizations with a report entitled, "Enlisting a New Generation of Florida Citizens." It is my sincere hope that this report will lead to constructive dialogue and action that will strengthen civic education in our state. Florida's future depends on it.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

"Enlisting a New Generation of Florida Citizens," a joint report from the Lou Frey Institute at the University of Central Florida and the Bob Graham Center at the University of Florida, offers recommendation, listed below, for making civic education a priority. Tell us what you think. Write to Ideas/Civics, The Daytona Beach News-Journal, P.O. Box 2831, Daytona Beach, FL., 32120-2831; fax 386-258-1577, or e-mail letters@news-jrnl.com (place "civics" in the subject line):

- Make civic education an integral part of our public school curriculum: Florida's current learning standards treat civics as an afterthought. We must utilize the scheduled 2007 revision of the Sunshine State Standards in Social Studies to update and strengthen those guidelines so that schools give students all of the skills they need to be effective citizens.
- Test civics on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test: Florida currently examines students on reading, writing, mathematics, and science --in short, every core academic subject but civics and social studies. Without assessment and accountability, civics will remain under-emphasized. We must add civics knowledge and skills to the subjects tested on the FCAT.
- Encourage and support teaching of civics in Florida's K-12 schools: Students will not be transformed into active citizens without teachers who are properly trained and empowered. We must make civics instruction an essential part of teacher education at Florida's colleges and universities and help teachers already in the classroom enhance their civics teaching skills and methods.
- Lead the nation in textbook improvement: Because of its strength in the textbook market, Florida has both an opportunity and a responsibility to improve instructional materials in civics as well as other core subjects. Educational policymakers must make use of Florida's unique influence to update academic standards, build instructional coalitions with other states, and review our own textbook selection process so that students in the state and across the country have the right learning tools.
- Establish a strategic center for Florida citizenship: Civics education is currently championed by a diffuse and independent array of students, parents, educators, elected officials, public policy centers and

advocacy organizations. We must establish and fund a center to support and help coordinate these efforts, monitor Florida's civic health, and keep us on track to produce educated and effective citizens.

Caros is president of the Florida Association of Social Studies Supervisors (www.fasss.org) and K-12 Social Studies Curriculum Specialist for Volusia County Schools. He contributed to the development of "Enlisting a New Generation of Florida Citizens," a report led by Bob Graham and Lou Frey.

PolkOnline

http://www.polkonline.com/stories/030607/opinion_civics.shtml

March 6, 2007

Floridians simply tune out civics

Responsible citizenship is at the heart of American democracy. In penning the immortal words of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson argued for a new and radical vision. Government in America was not to be based on the arbitrary exercise of power. It was to be a contract - a contract between publicly chosen leaders and ordinary citizens. The terms of that contract have now been clear for more than 200 years.

Leaders have the right to govern only insofar as citizens give their consent to be governed. Citizens, in turn, have a responsibility - a responsibility to exercise informed judgment in giving their consent.

Jefferson underscored the fundamental importance of informed citizenship when he wrote that the "objects of primary education" are to "instruct the mass of our citizens in these, their rights, interests and duties as men and citizens." One of these objects, Jefferson argued, was "To understand his duties to his neighbors and country, and to discharge with competence the functions confided to him by either ..."

The education of responsible citizens was, in the view of the nation's founders, to be a primary purpose of a system of public education. In his farewell address, George Washington called for the creation of "institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge" that would enlighten public opinion. In the years that followed, Washington's vision provided the foundation for what we now understand as American public education. It also gave to schools the unique challenge of preparing young people to effectively meet the critically important responsibilities of America's democratic contract.

As we approach the close of the first decade of the 21st century, there is cause for concern about the quality of American citizenship. For more than a decade now, scholars have pointed to a disconnect between citizens - particularly young citizens - and the civic world around them. We have one of the lowest voter turnout rates in the world. Participation in virtually all forms of civic life appears to have declined in the past half century. School reforms appear to be reshaping the civic mission of public schools. As the "Greatest Generation" passes from the scene, there are real questions about how we will replace their commitment to the common good.

With these concerns in mind, former U.S. Sen. Bob Graham and I asked the Lou Frey Institute at the University of Central Florida and the Bob Graham Center at the University of Florida to work with others across the state to review the major issues affecting civic education in Florida. This report reflects the results of that review.

As the report's recommendations will make clear, there is a compelling need to take near-term actions to strengthen civic education in the state. Having said that, however, we view this report as only a point of departure; the challenges of building and maintaining the enlightened discretion of Florida's citizens will require the combined talents and long-term commitment of all of those who care deeply about the state's future.

From the perspective of Florida's civic future, the big story of the 2006 elections was not that Democrats captured control of Congress, or that Bill Nelson was re-elected to the U.S. Senate, or even that Charlie Crist became our state's 44th governor, but that the significance of these political developments may be lost on many Floridians. For all of the hundreds of millions of dollars spent on political advertisements and thousands of news stories aired or written about the candidates, too many Floridians still have little or no idea who represents their interests in Washington, Tallahassee, or even their own local communities. And they have even less idea how those interests are represented, or how they as citizens can influence and shape that representation.

The numbers tell a troubling story about Floridians' lack of engagement with civic leaders, institutions and culture:

- Eligible Floridians exercise their vote far less often than citizens in other states. According to a 2006 report, Florida ranked 39th in average voter turnout for the 2002 and 2004 general elections.
- For the November 2006 general election, turnout in Florida was a disappointing 46.8 percent. In September 2006, primary election turnout was an abysmal 19.6 percent. Both figures were nearly 20 percent less than the historical average between 1954 and 2004.
- According to the 2006 report cited above, the same Florida that ranks fourth in population size rates a woeful 49th in rates of volunteering.
- A 2005 University of Central Florida survey of more than 1,600 Central Floridians found that two-thirds could not name either of Florida's two U.S. senators, both of whom reside in Central Florida.
- A 2005 statewide Florida Bar survey revealed that more than 40 percent of Floridians could not correctly identify the three branches of American government - and that nearly 40 percent could not define the concept of "checks and balances."

These statistics and others like them suggest two disturbing trends that threaten Florida's civic future: First, that many Floridians are not motivated to participate either in the political process or other aspects of our state's civic life; and second, that even if they had the necessary desire to participate, many Floridians would not know where or how to begin.

More to follow ...

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