
CIVICS IN THE CLASSROOM

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This is the first of a continuing series of articles which appeared in the "Unsung Heroes," Public Employees Roundtable newsletter.

Why such a series? Because we believe that the effective advancement of one of PER's three missions - to encourage young people to consider careers in the public service -- greatly depends upon how much young Americans know about their system of government and the responsibilities of citizenship.

However, we have had to conclude that schools, for many years, have generally not been teaching civics. Hence, we will try through these articles to expose more students to at least the basics of their country's government and the role of citizens in it.

How would these articles have such an impact? We will be urging all of our readers to make a point of finding out what (if anything) their local school system specifically offers in the way of civics. To what extent are students -- certainly by the time they are finishing high school -- knowledgeable about their country's government, based as it is on a federal structure and such constitutional principles as representation and the separation of powers, as well as about the importance of the citizens' role in this form of democracy.

And if such educational opportunities are absent in the system we will urge that, as parents and concerned citizens, our readers make their voices heard at the local and state levels to change this situation and to ask their friends and neighbors to do likewise.

For how can young persons be expected to consider working in the public sector with its thousands of career fields and millions of jobs -- if they have never had the benefit of learning how this whole governmental system is set up and operates? In effect, they are being cheated of, knowing about a large part of the world of

The Public Employees Roundtable is a non-partisan coalition of 32 management and professional organizations representing more than one million public employees and retirees. Since its founding in 1982, PER has had a single, clear, three-part mission -- to educate American citizens about the significant contributions public employees make to the quality of our lives; to encourage dedicated service among government employees; and to promote public service careers. The member association represents the broad spectrum of government professions that are able to join together with a single voice to promote and support the PER mission.

PER takes a proactive approach in creating programs, which offer the maximum opportunity to promote a positive public attitude towards government employees.

PER is currently the co-sponsor of United States Extemporaneous Speaking and the sponsor of Commentary at the LFG/NFL National Finals.

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work when thinking about choosing fulfilling employment. They will not discover the exciting challenges and many opportunities to serve their fellow citizens that public service offers.

We expect that this series of articles will be covering such topics as:

1. The vital significance of understanding the federal nature of our governmental system -- its national/state/local levels of Powers and responsibilities -- and hence differing employment fields and opportunities for service.
2. The importance of appreciating the operational effects of the principle of executive/legislative/judicial powers -- with some variation at the three structural levels -- and hence some quite special careers and roles found in these three branches.
3. The necessity of being acquainted with the various systems used for filling public sector positions, especially the ones based on merit and, hence, how better to prepare oneself for specific public career fields.

To conclude: If you are already convinced that something needs to be done to improve what our schools are doing (or not doing) in this area, there is no need to sit around waiting for the next article. Our stated purpose will already be accomplished by this article if you start to find out exactly what's going on with civics in your local school.

(Professor Lorentzen will be contributing a monthly column)