

Education is key to continued liberty NEW HAMPSHIRE VOICES

MORE THAN JOSIAH Bartlett's biography is the fact that he and the other founders had a fundamental grasp of what government is all about — the use of power.

There is no power like that of a government. Governments have the power to tax, to deprive you of your liberty, to regulate your business and ultimately take your life under certain circumstances. With that huge range of power the founders had to come up with a system that would preserve and protect their liberty, rather than allow unrestrained abuse of power as they had experienced under King George III.

Thus they developed the idea of dividing power vertically between towns, counties, states and the federal government. But they also developed the concept of a horizontal division of power between three branches of government, one to pass the laws, a second to execute them and a third to interpret the laws in the event of disputes with citizens or even between the two politically elected branches.

It is that genius of dividing power that protects our liberty and freedom from tyrants today.

However, what makes the challenge to modern America more complicated is a crucial demographic reality. We do NOT have one religion, one race, one ethnic group, or one language in this country, unlike most other countries.

The two things that unite and guide us are our mission statement in the Declaration of Independence and our operating manual in the form of the constitutions of our state and federal governments.

Unfortunately, I am concerned for the future when I see statistics about civic ignorance and constitutional illiteracy in our population. Over the last 20 years, there has been a dramatic decline in the knowledge base of our citizens because civics and constitutional government are no longer taught as required courses in our schools.

The statistics are stark. A report last year by Tufts University revealed that 35 percent of millennials said they are losing faith in American democracy.

Another survey showed that 25 percent of Americans think Judge Judy is on the U.S. Supreme Court.

Back in the 1800s during the beginning of the public education movement in this country, Horace Mann, the great proponent of universal education, advocated it because he knew this republic needed a population with sufficient knowledge to properly discharge civic and social duties, including informed voting.

Students don't inherently know all of the things I have mentioned so far tonight. They must be taught these principles and values and they cannot learn them from their iPhone or fellow classmates.

In our state, for the last 50 years, 15,000 students a year from our schools go through the New Hampshire Historical Society building as part of their visit to Concord and the State House. A couple of years ago the historical society had to stop its student tour of the Revolutionary War portion of the building because students had NO idea we had a revolution, that we were once under the control of Britain, that we were denied our rights, or that the Revolutionary War was a result of the abuse of power by one man.

Everyone who cares about continuing our republic should inquire of your own local schools as to how many hours and how many days are actually devoted to civics in the fourth, fifth, and eleventh grades. Then push for more.

We all need to rededicate ourselves to a population that understands WHY we have the government we have, or we will surely lose it.

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Attorney Chuck Douglas of Bow received the Josiah Bartlett Center's Libertas Award this week. Dr. Bartlett was a signer of the Declaration of Independence, a New Hampshire governor, congressman, and chief justice. This is excerpted from Douglas' acceptance remarks.



Chuck

Douglas
