

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

* * *

JOINT HEARING OF THE HOUSE
EDUCATION
and
VETERANS AFFAIRS AND
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS
COMMITTEES

* * *

IRVIS OFFICE BUILDING, G-50
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2016
9:32 A.M.

PRESENTATION ON HB 1858
CIVICS EDUCATION GRADUATION REQUIREMENT

BEFORE:

HONORABLE STANLEY E. SAYLOR, MAJORITY CHAIRMAN
HONORABLE JAMES ROEBUCK, MINORITY CHAIRMAN
HONORABLE STEPHEN BARRAR, MAJORITY CHAIRMAN
HONORABLE CHRIS SAINATO, MINORITY CHAIRMAN
HONORABLE HAL ENGLISH
HONORABLE MARK M. GILLEN
HONORABLE KRISTIN HILL
HONORABLE HARRY LEWIS
HONORABLE BERNIE O'NEILL
HONORABLE KATHY L. RAPP
HONORABLE CRAIG STAATS
HONORABLE MIKE TOBASH
HONORABLE PATRICK HARKINS
HONORABLE PATTY KIM
HONORABLE MARK LONGIETTI
HONORABLE STEVE McCARTER
HONORABLE MICHAEL SCHLOSSBERG
HONORABLE KAREN BOBACK

*Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*

BEFORE: (continued)

HONORABLE LYNDA SCHLEGEL CULVER
HONORABLE FRANK A. FARRY
HONORABLE MARK M. GILLEN
HONORABLE LEE JAMES
HONORABLE BARRY JOZWIAK
HONORABLE MIKE REGAN
HONORABLE RICK SACCONI
HONORABLE BRYAN BARBIN
HONORABLE MARIA P. DONATUCCI
HONORABLE WILLIAM C. KORTZ

COMMITTEE STAFF PRESENT:

RICK O'LEARY
 MAJORITY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
SEAN HARRIS
 MAJORITY RESEARCH ANALYST
LU ANN FAHNDRICH
 MAJORITY ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
AMY BRINTON
 MINORITY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
HARRY BUCHER
 MINORITY RESEARCH ANALYST
IAN MAHAL
 MINORITY RESEARCH ANALYST

Tiffany L. Mast • Mast Reporting
mastreporting@gmail.com
(717) 348-1275

I N D E X

TESTIFIERS

* * *

<u>NAME</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
DR. LUCIAN SPATARO CHAIR, CIVICS EDUCATION INITIATIVE.....	14
JUDGE MARJORIE RENDELL PRESIDENT, RENDELL CENTER FOR CIVICS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT.....	21
COMMANDER BROWN VFW	54
COMMANDER OLSHEFSKIE AMERICAN LEGION	59
W. GERARD OLEKSIAK PRESIDENT, PENNSYLVANIA STATE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION.....	71
LEE ANN WENTZEL SUPERINTENDENT / PENNSYLVANIA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS.....	77
JOHN CALLAHAN ASSISTANT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION.....	90
DR. PAUL HEALEY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PENNSYLVANIA PRINCIPALS ASSOCIATION.....	95

SUBMITTED WRITTEN TESTIMONY

* * *

(See submitted written testimony and handouts
online.)

Tiffany L. Mast • Mast Reporting
mastreporting@gmail.com
(717) 348-1275

1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 * * *

3 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: I'd like to
4 call this meeting to order, meeting of the Veterans
5 Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee and
6 also the Education Committee.

7 I'm going to go out to the audience and
8 ask John Getz if he would lead us in the Pledge of
9 Allegiance.

10 (The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.)

11 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Do you want to
12 start opening comments?

13 MINORITY CHAIRMAN SAYLOR: Good morning,
14 everyone.

15 I wanted to make a few comments as we get
16 this hearing started. I first want to apologize. I
17 have to leave for a very important meeting, but I will
18 be back. As Chairman of the House Education Committee,
19 I'm pleased that we're having this hearing today on
20 this very important issue and look forward to hearing
21 the testimony as we move forward.

22 I want to thank Representative Boback and
23 Representative Kortz for their introduction of this
24 legislation. As somebody who loves history and
25 thought I was going to be a history teacher at one

1 point, it's amazing what they are talking about
2 here. But there are different perspectives.
3 Particularly, as we move forward, we know that the
4 Federal government has passed the new ESSA Act,
5 which is affecting how we're doing education in
6 Pennsylvania and across our nation.

7 But I do want to note that we are having
8 a very important discussion right now in this State,
9 as many States are, as to graduation requirements
10 here in Pennsylvania. The Keystones are under
11 consideration. So as we move forward, I look
12 forward to hearing the testimony on both sides of
13 the issue of having a civics test for graduation
14 requirements and hearing the different perspectives
15 from all of the testifiers.

16 So with that, Chairman Barrar.

17 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Thank you,
18 Chairman Saylor.

19 I appreciate you having convened this
20 meeting with the Education Committee on a very, very
21 important topic to us in regard to educating our
22 young high school students on the history of this
23 great nation and how our system of government is the
24 greatest in the world.

25 We have with us today several excellent

1 panelists, and I'm looking forward to a great
2 discussion on this important issue.

3 Minority Chair.

4 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SAYLOR: Chairman
5 Roebuck got tied up in traffic. He'll be here
6 shortly.

7 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR:
8 Chairman Sainato, comments?

9 MINORITY CHAIRMAN SAINATO: Thank you,
10 Chairman Barrar, Chairman Saylor.

11 It's good that we have such a large crowd
12 here on a Monday morning, but I think this issue is
13 very important. I want to commend Representative
14 Boback and Representative Kortz for bringing this to
15 the forefront because I think that, you know, when
16 you look at civics -- I have a degree in education
17 and in social studies, so I know how important it is
18 -- I think we've gotten away from some of the basics
19 over the last 20-plus years, and you know, we're
20 going to lose a generation when students don't know
21 the difference between the State government, the
22 Federal government, the local government, and we're
23 not teaching them the basics.

24 You know, that's something, I think, we
25 need to address. I know this legislation goes a

1 long way toward that. You know, I was at the press
2 conference, and I have followed this since Day One.
3 When you have people becoming citizens in our
4 country who know more than some of our graduating
5 students about our government, that's a sad state of
6 affairs. We need our kids to be the topnotch and
7 understand government and how it works because when
8 you have people working together, that's how it
9 happens. And if you have no clue how your
10 government works, we're going to lose another
11 generation.

12 So I look forward to the testimony today,
13 and I thank both of the prime sponsors of this
14 legislation because this is an issue, I think, its
15 time has come to get out there and we can have some
16 serious discussion.

17 Thank you.

18 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: We have the
19 sponsors. A few comments from the sponsors of the
20 bill. Representative Kortz and Representative
21 Boback, if you both would like to make comments.

22 REPRESENTATIVE KORTZ: Good morning,
23 Chairman Saylor, Chairman Barrar, Chairman Roebuck,
24 Chairman Sainato, Committee members.

25 I want to thank the chairmen for holding

1 this joint hearing today on this very important
2 measure for our children and our country.

3 My good friend and colleague,
4 Representative Boback, and I bring before the
5 Committee HB 1858. It's a bipartisan bill with
6 nearly 50 cosponsors. This bill would ensure that
7 our students will be taught basic civics in our
8 schools. And we need to do this so they can
9 understand our nation, our government, to understand
10 our representative republic so that they can be
11 better prepared to be engaged as citizens in our
12 democracy.

13 The Pennsylvania House of Representatives
14 believes that civics is so important that just last
15 week, as you recall, we passed unanimously
16 Representative Kate Harper's resolution, HR 969,
17 declaring the week of September 17th through the
18 23rd as Civics Education Awareness Week. That just
19 happened last week.

20 HB 1858 that Representative Boback and I
21 offer basically will require students to pass the
22 U.S. Citizenship Test to graduate high school. That
23 being said, we offer a lot of flexibility for the
24 students and for the administrators in this bill,
25 and we're willing to tweak it as we need to to get

1 it through.

2 Briefly, the U.S. Citizenship Test is
3 currently online, and it's free. The test has 100
4 questions, but students will only be required to
5 pass 60 percent to achieve a passing score. And
6 that is in alignment with what the folks who want to
7 become citizens today have to pass. They have to
8 also achieve 60 percent.

9 Students can take the test as many times
10 as they want. They can start taking it in ninth
11 grade. There are 100 questions. We can break it
12 up, and they can do 25 questions in ninth grade, 25
13 in tenth, all the way through twelfth. Again, they
14 can take it as many times as they want. We just
15 want them to understand how our government works.
16 We want them to get a 60-percent passing grade. As
17 I stated earlier, we are very flexible, and this
18 will be very flexible.

19 In my district, I currently have a social
20 studies teacher. Her name is Ms. Kerri Yablonsky,
21 and she couldn't be here today, but she did offer
22 some testimony. There's a one-page write-up.
23 Basically what Kerri does, she utilizes this test
24 already as a diagnostic tool. She gives the test in
25 the beginning of the school year to her ninth

1 graders. She gets a baseline of where they're at,
2 understands what they need to improve on, and
3 establishes that content in her curriculum and then
4 gives the test at the end of the year to see where
5 they fall at. And she's using it already. She
6 thinks it's a great idea. And again, her testimony
7 is in your packet.

8 There's a number of groups you're going
9 to hear from today that are in support of this.
10 Again, I want to thank the chairs and the committees
11 for holding this hearing today. I look forward to
12 hearing the testimony.

13 REPRESENTATIVE BOBACK: Thank you, Mr.
14 Chairman, for being so gracious as to hold this for
15 us today.

16 My comments are going to come directly
17 from the Civics Education Initiative, which is a
18 national initiative, simple concept. The initiative
19 is the first step to ensure that all students are
20 taught basic civics about how our government works
21 and who we are as a nation -- who we are as a
22 nation -- things that every student should know in
23 order to be ready for active engaged citizenship.

24 I have the test with me today. You can
25 get it right off the net. It's not going to be an

1 unfunded mandate because the test is right there.

2 All you have to do is hit your finger, and there is
3 the test at your disposal.

4 *Who is the President of the United States*
5 *of America?*

6 *Who is the Vice President of the United*
7 *States of America?*

8 *Should something happen to our President,*
9 *who will take office?*

10 And that's so important for our students
11 to know because many of them know who they want to
12 vote for or support as a President, but they don't
13 realize how important the running mate actually is.

14 *Name one war fought by the United States*
15 *in the 1900s.* Acceptable answers: World War I,
16 World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War, and the
17 Persian Gulf War.

18 These are answers that we lived through
19 in our generation, but these are questions and
20 answers that our students need to be cognizant of to
21 be leaders in our society. Just two facts,
22 according to the National Assessment of Educational
23 Progress, only 24 percent of U.S. high school
24 students are proficient in civics. Studies by the
25 Annenberg Foundation show that a third of U.S.

1 citizens can't even name even one branch of our
2 Federal government. We are leaving our legacy to
3 this next generation. They need to know about our
4 country, about citizenship. And if we're requiring
5 immigrants to take this test to become citizens,
6 proud citizens, then, surely, we can expect the same
7 from our own.

8 So as a mother, as a former educator, and
9 now as a legislator, I ask that you consider making
10 this a part of Pennsylvania curriculum, requiring
11 that this civics test be taken and 60 percent --
12 only 60 percent proficiency -- by our students. It
13 will expose them to what we live in in the United
14 States democracy.

15 I thank you for your time.

16 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Could we take
17 a minute for the Representatives in the room to
18 introduce themselves to the audience, starting with
19 Mike here.

20 If you want to --

21 REPRESENTATIVE TOBASH: Representative
22 Mike Tobash -- (Inaudible - microphone malfunction).

23 REPRESENTATIVE GILLEN: Mark Gillen,
24 Berks and Lancaster Counties.

25 REPRESENTATIVE McCARTER: Steve McCarter,

1 House District 154, Montgomery County.

2 REPRESENTATIVE HILL: Kristen Phillips
3 Hill, 93rd District, southern York County.

4 REPRESENTATIVE JOZWIAK: Barry Jozwiak,
5 Berks County.

6 REPRESENTATIVE SCHLOSSBERG: Mike
7 Schlossberg, Lehigh County.

8 REPRESENTATIVE ENGLISH: Al English,
9 Allegheny County.

10 REPRESENTATIVE LONGIETTI: Good morning.
11 Mark Longietti from Mercer County.

12 REPRESENTATIVE RAPP: Kathy Rapp, Warren
13 County, 56th District, Warren, Forest and Crawford.

14 REPRESENTATIVE SACCONI: Rick Saccone,
15 southern Allegheny and northern Washington Counties.

16 REPRESENTATIVE STAATS: Good morning.
17 Craig Staats, the 144th District, Bucks
18 County.

19 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN ADOLPH: I want to
20 thank all the members for being here bright and
21 early on a Monday morning and taking time out to
22 support the meeting.

23 Do you want to introduce the first panel?

24 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SAYLOR: Sure.

25 If our first panel would come forward, we

1 have in our first panel, Dr. Lucian Spataro, who is
2 chair of the Civics Education Initiative, and the
3 Most Honorable Marjorie Rendell, who is our former
4 First Lady of Pennsylvania and is President of the
5 Rendell Center for Civics and Civic Engagement.

6 Please, whoever wants to start first.

7 DR. SPATARO: Is this on? Oh, perfect.

8 I'd like to open up the discussion today
9 with a brief video. I think you're going to turn
10 that on.

11 (Pause.)

12 It's Monday morning.

13 Good afternoon. My name is Lucian
14 Spataro, and I serve as Chief Academic Officer for
15 the Joe Foss Institute.

16 On behalf of the Institute, I want to
17 thank Representatives Kortz and Boback, as well as
18 the almost 50 bipartisan cosponsors, for introducing
19 this important proposal.

20 The Joe Foss Institute is the enduring
21 legacy of the late Joe Foss, a World War II Medal of
22 Honor recipient who founded the Institute in 2001.
23 JFI has now served nearly two million students
24 across the country through its Veterans Inspiring
25 Patriotism Program.

1 We bring educational materials, the flag
2 to mount on the wall, the Declaration of
3 Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of
4 Rights into classrooms across the country for
5 teachers and students to work with. It is an
6 inspiring program that serves students in all 50
7 States, veterans and teachers.

8 Historically, one of the primary goals of
9 public education, as envisioned by Thomas Jefferson,
10 was to instill in our youth the civic virtues that
11 would sustain our fledgling republic. Today,
12 however, we're facing a crisis. As the emphasis has
13 shifted to STEM, the importance of teaching basic
14 civics has now taken a back seat. Justice O'Connor
15 has often termed this the quiet crisis in education,
16 but we truly believe it's the quiet crisis in
17 America.

18 While it may not be playing out every day
19 on the front page, the sad fact is that we have a
20 crisis in civics education that has become an
21 epidemic over the past few decades. Because this
22 epidemic developed under our watch -- that's all of
23 us here in the room today -- it's our responsibility
24 to act urgently to address it.

25 We've all seen the embarrassing

1 man-on-the-street interviews on late night TV, where
2 Americans can't answer even basic questions about
3 our nation. Numerous studies have shown that a vast
4 majority of American students and adults, as well,
5 lack the basic understanding of how our country was
6 founded, how it's governed, and what it means to be
7 a citizen.

8 According to the National Assessment of
9 Educational Progress, only nine percent of fourth
10 grade students can identify a picture of
11 Abraham Lincoln and tell us two things that he did
12 that were important. In eighth grade, just seven
13 percent of students could correctly identify the
14 three branches of government. And overall, as
15 pointed out earlier, only 24 percent of seniors in
16 high schools scored proficient or above on the NAEP
17 Civics Test.

18 The national achievement gap in reading
19 and math is unsurprisingly also present in social
20 studies and civics. Scores were even lower for
21 low-income and minority students, with black
22 students scoring on average, 24 to 30 points lower
23 than their white counterparts.

24 This persistent civic gap undermines all
25 citizens, but disproportionately affects civic

1 engagement and empowerment for under-represented
2 communities, impacting everything from voter turnout
3 to trust in our institutions. It comes as no
4 surprise, when people do not understand the system
5 by which they are governed, including how to affect
6 change in that system, they're naturally frustrated
7 and this often leads them to disengage from the
8 political process.

9 Recognizing these problems, in 2014, JFI
10 launched the Civics Initiative, which is based on
11 one simple concept, that American high school
12 students, as a condition for graduation, should be
13 able to pass the very same test that all new
14 immigrants must be able to pass.

15 Since launching the initiative in 2014,
16 14 States have now enacted this exact or very
17 similar legislation. An additional 25 States will
18 be considering the legislation next year. I've got
19 a map in your packets there that shows the various
20 States that have enacted the legislation, and also
21 the States that are considering it this year, coming
22 up in 2017.

23 By the end of '17, we hope to have passed
24 this legislation in over half of the country. We
25 feel confident that we'll get that accomplished,

1 probably 35 States.

2 Our initiative was specifically designed
3 to provide schools with maximum flexibility. By
4 using a well-established test and study materials
5 that are readily available online, this legislation
6 can be implemented with no cost to States and
7 districts. In fact, all of these States have passed
8 this legislation with zero fiscal impact.

9 In fact, JFI is also developing online
10 lesson plans for each of the 100 questions, and we
11 now have an online test portal that teachers can
12 access for free to help them administer the test.

13 Nearly 92 percent of new immigrants
14 applying for citizenship pass this test on their
15 first attempt, and I would hope our students could
16 do as well or better, but they can't. Those that
17 don't pass the test on the first go-round can take
18 it as many times as they need. The questions stay
19 the same each time. And our free test portal even
20 helps them identify areas where they need to study
21 further.

22 This is also not intended to be a
23 one-size-fits-all approach. Instead, it establishes
24 a baseline of knowledge, like learning your
25 multiplication tables in math or the periodic table

1 in science, to ensure our students know at least as
2 much about the fundamentals of how our country
3 operates as immigrants who become citizens must
4 know. It's not a panacea, nor is it a silver
5 bullet, but it is meant to be a strong first step
6 toward ensuring and encouraging civic engagement in
7 our youth.

8 In closing, as a professor myself, I have
9 a question for any of you in the audience, or as
10 former students.

11 What is the one question that you know a
12 student will always ask you as an educator without
13 fail every single time during every single lecture,
14 and I mean every time?

15 What is it?

16 *Is this going to be on the test?*

17 Exactly.

18 If you answer, yes, the students all lean
19 forward, they take notes, and they're engaged in the
20 subject matter. On the other hand, if you say, no,
21 the entire class leans back and you can see them
22 relax, drift off, and disengage.

23 So from a student's perspective, having
24 civics on a test that matters is very important. As
25 this relates to America, the same is true. We want

1 our students leaning forward. We want them engaged,
2 but every year that goes by, more and more students
3 and soon-to-be-voting citizens are being left behind
4 due to the lack of emphasis on this important
5 content area.

6 Help us put civics back on a test that
7 matters today, so our students graduate as actively
8 engaged, informed and responsible citizens.

9 Thank you very much.

10 I think we're ready to show the video.
11 I'm not sure.

12 This is actually --

13 (Video played.)

14 DR. SPATARO: So this is a little funny,
15 but in reality, it's a little sad. It really is.
16 And we're here to resolve this issue, by and large.
17 We've been doing this now for a couple of years, and
18 Jay Leno actually came to our gala event last year.
19 And he is a great comedian, but he actually told us
20 that he did this initially because he thought it was
21 funny, but after about two years of doing it, it
22 wasn't funny anymore.

23 And when Jay left that show, he now is
24 helping us and is on our board of advisors because
25 he is very concerned about the country. He's been

1 doing this for 15 or 20 years, man-on-the-street
2 interviews, and at the end, he didn't want to do it
3 anymore. It was so scary and so disconcerting to
4 him, that he decided not to do it anymore. And one
5 of the reasons that he quit the show was because
6 that was such a powerful piece of his gig, and he is
7 not happy with the situation and is actually on our
8 board of advisors. It's a scary situation. It
9 really is.

10 And we'll pass it on now to Judge
11 Rendell.

12 JUDGE RENDELL: Good morning, Chairman
13 Saylor, Chairman Roebuck, Chairman Barrar, Chairman
14 Sainato, and members of the House Education and
15 Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness
16 Committees.

17 Thank you for providing me the
18 opportunity to testify on House Bill 1858. I am
19 going to focus my remarks on the benefits and
20 necessity of civics education, which House Bill 1858
21 highlights.

22 Let me begin with why civic education is
23 important. It's important not only for the
24 substantive content-based knowledge about our
25 country and democracy, but also the development of

1 skills necessary for adult citizenship; skills of
2 critical thinking -- and I think we saw how we
3 really don't have critical thinking -- problem
4 solving; and informed participation.

5 These skills transfer to all subjects,
6 but more importantly, they transfer to life, to be
7 productive/active citizens and workers, the skills
8 needed by the citizenry if our democracy is to
9 survive.

10 The education of young people to assume
11 their role as citizens in a democratic society is
12 the central mission of our schools. The primary
13 impetus for establishing public schools in the
14 United States was to educate a diverse American
15 population into a literate and informed citizenry.

16 In his Farewell Address, President George
17 Washington argued for the creation of, and I quote,
18 *institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge*
19 *in a democratic society.*

20 It is essential that the youth of our
21 country understand this and have the proper
22 knowledge, skills and dispositions of effective
23 citizens. As individuals serving in the public
24 sector, you understand this. Our veterans in the
25 room certainly understand this, having risked their

1 lives to defend the Constitution of the United
2 States. It is important that, at every level, we
3 explore the principles of rights and
4 responsibilities and the role of an active citizen.

5 I do not believe that we are asking too
6 much of our citizens to acquire basic knowledge
7 about our democracy. In fact, I believe you will
8 find that the Naturalization Test fits nicely within
9 the Pennsylvania Standards for Civics and
10 Government.

11 The evidence of a decline in civic
12 education is abundant and quite visible, from the
13 many surveys of our fellow citizens' lack of basic
14 civic knowledge, to the growing distrust of and
15 alienation from the governmental institutions that
16 we the people should truly own. Evidence of the
17 decline in effective civic education is all around
18 us. You've heard the statistics.

19 An Annenberg Public Policy Survey
20 released on Constitution Day showed that many
21 Americans are unfamiliar with basic facts about
22 their government. And I think you've heard these
23 statistics. Only one in three Americans could name
24 all three branches of the United States government,
25 while just as many, 31 percent, could not identify

1 even one.

2 Of the survey, Kathleen Hall Jamieson,
3 director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center, said
4 lack of basic civics knowledge is worrisome and an
5 argument for an increased focus on civics education
6 in our schools -- something I believe this bill will
7 bring about.

8 On the last National Assessments of
9 Educational Progress civics test done in 2014,
10 barely one-fourth of the students tested could
11 demonstrate a proficient understanding of this topic
12 so critical to our nation's future. The NAEP Civics
13 Test scores have remained flat since the first NAEP
14 Civics Test was administered in 1998.

15 A 2015 Xavier University study showed
16 that while 97.5 percent of those applying for
17 citizenship ultimately pass the test, only two out
18 of three Americans can do the same. There are many
19 reasons for this decline. Among the most
20 significant is an over-emphasis on a few curricular
21 subjects over others, lack of attention to civics
22 because it is not part of most States' testing
23 regimes, and a lack of appreciation for the central
24 role the civic mission of our schools plays in
25 maintaining the health of our representative

1 democracy.

2 In the judiciary, I see the consequences
3 of a lack of civic education every day. The lack of
4 understanding of, and at times, lack of respect for,
5 the rule of law and independence of the judiciary
6 makes me doubly concerned about the state of civic
7 education.

8 Let me give you a little background about
9 my personal journey with civics education and why Ed
10 Rendell and I started the Rendell Center for Civics
11 and Civic Engagement. When Ed became Governor of
12 Pennsylvania, I decided to focus my efforts as First
13 Lady on promoting civics education. I formed a
14 coalition known as PennCORD with the Pennsylvania
15 Bar Association, the Department of Education, the
16 National Constitution Center, that did work in
17 civics education across the Commonwealth.

18 The very positive feedback from teachers,
19 administrators, students and parents regarding the
20 need for the PennCORD initiative and our own
21 realization after spending 30 years in public
22 service, is what led us to establish the Rendell
23 Center.

24 It is our vision that all students must
25 have a basic understanding of our representative

1 democracy -- that is content knowledge; need to
2 experience public participation in the democratic
3 process to include democratic deliberation, a skill
4 set; and need to be better prepared to be engaged
5 citizens who understand their rights and
6 responsibilities as citizens.

7 For educators, the Rendell Center creates
8 curriculum content, pedagogical tools, and
9 professional development experiences. For students,
10 we developed literacy-based programs and
11 experiential learning exercises. Our program, We
12 the Civics Kids, being piloted in Philadelphia
13 schools, is designed to provide civic education to
14 our youngest citizens through a rich, interactive
15 program that marries reading and civic literacy.
16 The goal for the program is to create a culture of
17 active citizenship in our schools through materials
18 that build basic civic knowledge, promote
19 engagement, and provide on-going opportunities for
20 developing the art of democratic deliberation. At
21 the same time, We the Civics Kids materials are
22 strengthening each student's reading, writing,
23 speaking, thinking, and problem-solving skills.
24 We've seen a dramatic increase in our pilot school
25 in their reading comprehension skills.

1 During the PennCORD years, the Allentown
2 School District implemented a civics-based school
3 violence prevention demonstration program run by the
4 Center for Civic Education. Allentown saw improved
5 test scores and school climate.

6 I share with you the work of the Rendell
7 Center because it shows the benefits of an emphasis
8 on civic education, not just on knowledge
9 development, but on skill sets that are important
10 for an engaged citizenry.

11 Constitution Day became a national
12 observance in 2004, when Congress passed a law
13 proposed by Senator Robert Byrd that designated
14 September 17th as the day for citizens to
15 commemorate the signing of the Constitution and
16 learn more about our founding document. This law
17 mandates the teaching of the Constitution at
18 educational institutions that receive Federal funds,
19 as well as Federal agencies.

20 There was no mechanism in the Byrd
21 Amendment for tracking participation. However, the
22 Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools estimates
23 that 80 percent of public schools and over 60
24 percent of higher education engage in some
25 observance on Constitution Day. Still, it is no

1 substitute for systemic and sustained civic
2 education. One day is not enough.

3 I mention Constitution Day because there
4 was pushback at first against this mandate, but
5 Constitution Day continues 12 years later with
6 positive results similar to what I believe HB 1858
7 can do. HB 1858 is one way we can focus on the
8 central mission of our schools, citizenship
9 education and highlighting the importance of this
10 education.

11 Students will have several years to take
12 the test and will need to pass with only 60 percent
13 of the questions correct on a test that is already
14 designed and administered by the United States
15 Citizenship and Immigration Services to thousands
16 each year.

17 Others will speak of the mechanics of
18 implementation, but what I would like to stress is
19 the necessity of providing this education to our
20 youth. A student's readiness for the future should
21 include not just college and career, but readiness
22 for active engaged citizenship.

23 I would like to end by sharing with you a
24 quote from some young students on the importance of
25 civics education, which sums up why this bill is

1 important. Our annual Lenfest Citizenship
2 Challenge, essentially a class essay contest, has
3 made in-depth focus on an issue of civic importance
4 a fun learning experience.

5 Two years ago in the Rendell Center's
6 Citizenship Challenge, we asked fourth and fifth
7 graders how to increase voter participation. We
8 received over 250 essays from classrooms on this
9 topic. I would like to share with you a portion of
10 the words of the winning essay. These words from
11 fifth grade students are powerful and relevant to
12 our discussions today. It shows that emphasized
13 civics education can bring about an informed and
14 engaged citizenry.

15 And I quote, *we believe that it is*
16 *essential that all students recognize their role in*
17 *our democracy and appreciate the importance of each*
18 *vote. Our Founding Fathers would surely be*
19 *disappointed by the lack of voter participation in*
20 *our elections. The foundation of our society was*
21 *based on the belief that power comes from the*
22 *people. In fact, this is one of our Constitution's*
23 *core principles. We declared our independence from*
24 *Great Britain so that we could have representation*
25 *in our government. And yet today, voter apathy is*

1 widespread. Establishing civic education programs
2 will allow the youth to learn about the importance
3 of voting at a young age. Impressing upon young
4 minds the significance of voting will ignite in them
5 a desire to fulfill the legacy of the Founding
6 Fathers who sacrificed so much to establish our
7 country. The voice of the people can only be heard
8 if they participate to the fullest extent possible,
9 and the best way to have your voice heard is to
10 vote. I say, from the mouths of babes.

11 Thank you so much.

12 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Thank you,
13 Judge Rendell.

14 Just a quick announcement. We've been
15 joined by Chairman Roebuck and also Representative
16 Culver, Representative Harkins and Representative
17 Regan.

18 Chairman Roebuck, did you want to make
19 any comments before we go to questions?

20 MINORITY CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: No. I
21 certainly look forward to this discussion and think
22 it's very necessary.

23 I just had one general observation when I
24 looked at the video, if I might. We focus upon our
25 youth as a source of our problem, but if I go back

1 to four years ago, in the presidential primary, it
2 seems to me we had people who were running for
3 President of the United States, many of whom had
4 college and graduate educations, who had had the
5 same kind of trouble answering basic questions on
6 American government and American structure.
7 Certainly, in their comments, they certainly didn't
8 know American history, which I taught for more years
9 than I could think about.

10 So I think this is a much deeper problem
11 than just young people. It's a problem that's
12 inherent in our society. It's ingrained in certain
13 ways because we haven't v done a very good job up to
14 now and maybe we ought to look at ways not only to
15 do it at this point, but at other points, as well.

16 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Thank you, Mr.
17 Chairman.

18 Questions from the Representatives, any
19 of the Representatives at the front table?

20 Representative Tobash?

21 REPRESENTATIVE TOBASH: Thank you.

22 (Inaudible - microphone malfunction).

23 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Can you speak
24 up just a little louder?

25 REPRESENTATIVE TOBASH: (Inaudible -

1 microphone malfunction.)

2 DR. SPATARO: Well, yeah, let me comment
3 on that for, a second.

4 My background, actually, just so you all
5 know is I'm a STEM professor at a Research 1
6 institution, the University of Arizona, in Tucson,
7 Arizona. And I was a professor down there for 15
8 years -- biology, by the way. And so I'm probably
9 the one advocate for civics that you wouldn't
10 believe would be out here advocating, but I see it
11 as very, very important. And I'm also a business
12 person, post my work as a University of Arizona
13 professor, so I kind of see both sides of the coin.

14 But what happened, by and large, is that
15 STEM became a really emphasized set of disciplines a
16 couple of decades ago. And then what happened on
17 the heels of that is all of the questions on the
18 standardized tests were STEM-related questions. So
19 schools and teachers didn't really have an incentive
20 to do anything but teach STEM.

21 So civics has now taken a back seat to
22 STEM, and we can see that with the responses from
23 the kids on the street and that sort of thing. It's
24 been a slippery slope that's occurred over the last
25 couple of decades, and it's happened on our watch.

1 So I think it's our responsibility to fix the
2 problem, and we can fix the problem. This isn't new
3 content. This is content that our forefathers asked
4 us to build schools around. I mean, that's what
5 schools are in business to do, first and foremost,
6 push forward the civic virtues that would sustain
7 our fledgling republic, and that has all been lost
8 over the last couple of decades, again, on our
9 watch.

10 Civics is not new content. Government is
11 not new content. It just needs to be emphasized
12 like Justice O'Connor said, so it's no longer the
13 quiet crisis. Again, I think a lot of the problems
14 we have in the country will go away when we're all
15 on the same page, and we're not on the same page
16 right now. A lot of the folks feel they're
17 disenfranchised or demarginalized. I think that's
18 because they don't know how to affect change in the
19 system that governs our country. So if we're all on
20 the same page, I think, going forward, everyone will
21 be a lot more conducive to consensus.

22 REPRESENTATIVE TOBASH: (Inaudible -
23 microphone malfunction).

24 DR. SPATARO: Right.

25 REPRESENTATIVE TOBASH: (Inaudible -

1 microphone malfunction).

2 DR. SPATARO: Now, standardized tests --
3 well, let me step back for a second.

4 This particular legislative proposal
5 differs from mandated standardized testing in two
6 ways.

7 One, the States that have passed this
8 sort of legislation thus far -- many of those States
9 have passed it just as we're asking for it to be
10 passed, as a test that kids need to take and pass to
11 graduate. Others are customizing the test. A lot
12 of the customization is occurring at the school
13 level.

14 So we're leaving that up to educators at
15 the schools, at their level, to do what they see fit
16 with the test. All we're asking them to do is tell
17 us that the kids passed the test. So you can break
18 the test up into three sections: government,
19 geography, and history, or you can pass it all at
20 once. You can teach it all at once.

21 We're leaving it up to the various States
22 on how they want to emphasize civics and how they
23 want to move this legislation further. We're just
24 asking them to put it on the front burner with STEM,
25 so it's equally emphasized.

1 The other major difference between this
2 legislative proposal and standardized mandated
3 testing, this is a set of expectations. It's a huge
4 difference between expectations and a mandated test.
5 We're asking that you don't need to collect the
6 data. The data is what all the costs revolve
7 around. So in standardized testing -- 99 percent of
8 the cost of standardized testing is collecting the
9 data, assembling the data at the district and State
10 levels, and then disseminating that data back out to
11 schools.

12 We're not asking you to collect the data.
13 All we're saying is, did the kids pass the test?
14 And the schools can do that at their level. A lot
15 of kids -- for example, in Arizona, one of our
16 employees walked into the Institute a couple of
17 weeks ago and said, *my grandson passed the test*.
18 All he got was a little asterisk next to his name.
19 He's in middle school, passed the test, so he goes
20 on to graduate. But that's not a mandated test that
21 goes to the Department of Ed, and all of that data
22 and the costs associated with the collection of that
23 data. That isn't what this is all about. We're
24 just asking you to tell us that the kids passed the
25 test, and that emphasis will happen at the school

1 level from that point forward.

2 REPRESENTATIVE TOBASH: Thank you so
3 much.

4 (Inaudible - microphone malfunction).

5 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Chairman
6 Sainato.

7 REPRESENTATIVE SAINATO: Thank you.

8 Thank you, Judge Rendell and Dr. Spataro.
9 I mean, I think this is very impacting testimony
10 because you watch the video, and we all laughed a
11 little bit, but then you start thinking about it.
12 These are the college students. These are the ones
13 that -- we talk about STEM and all the other
14 stuff -- these are supposedly your top students, and
15 they don't have an answer.

16 Where are the rest?

17 DR. SPATARO: It's a scary situation.

18 REPRESENTATIVE SAINATO: Yeah, I look at
19 that -- and as Representative Tobash said, and
20 Chairman Roebuck, I think there's even a further
21 problem here. It starts, not just with the
22 students, it starts at home. I mean, you're getting
23 this where parents don't know, and they're not
24 talking to their kids about world government
25 affairs.

1 I remember when I was in school, you
2 would have a time to have a current events
3 discussion, where students were asked questions,
4 *what's going on in government, what's going on --*
5 and you don't have that today.

6 But whose fault is it?

7 I mean, you know, I visit my schools in
8 my district. I talk to grades 4, 8 and 12, or 5, 9
9 and 12, depending on the school district. And even
10 with the younger kids, it's harder to get in the
11 school because they're busy preparing for the ESEAs
12 or PSAs. Okay. So they're spending months to study
13 for a test. We keep creating new and new tests for
14 them. And now, you know, we need to step back. And
15 I've talked to teachers; they've shown me a test, a
16 fourth and a fifth grade test. It was ridiculous
17 some of the questions on that test. Whereas, if you
18 let some of the teachers teach and let them get back
19 to where the students are and make it interesting,
20 these kids, I believe, will learn and I don't know
21 -- I'm just -- when you see that, it disturbs me
22 because I know what it is. I mean, they knew better
23 20 and 30 years ago than we're getting today.

24 I think this legislation is a start, but
25 there's a further, I think, a further problem out

1 there that we're going to have to address, and this
2 legislation will not address that. But teaching for
3 the tests, when they're spending months just
4 preparing, because if they don't pass that test, the
5 school district gets beat to heck and the image is,
6 oh, they're failing, which actually isn't true, but
7 that's the image. And I think we have a more
8 serious problem, but I just -- that video was very,
9 you know, troubling.

10 Troubling is the word because it's like
11 these kids are so smart, they know all the other
12 social events out there, but you don't even know who
13 the vice president is; you don't even know about the
14 Civil War. I mean, these are things -- it doesn't
15 take that much to do this, but I thank both of you.
16 I just think this is very enlightening. Hopefully,
17 this will move us at least one step closer.

18 JUDGE RENDELL: I think this is a start.

19 REPRESENTATIVE SAINATO: Yeah.

20 JUDGE RENDELL: This is basic.

21 What we're trying to do at the Rendell
22 Center is inculcate this type of learning early on
23 so students become proficient just by their nature,
24 but this test is not like the rigorous testing that,
25 you know, the teachers need to drill down with these

1 kids and that, you know, the unfunded -- the
2 mandate. If we make it a mandate, that's because we
3 should be doing it voluntarily. And I think a
4 pushback on this, we should kind of be ashamed of
5 ourselves if we say, *oh, this is just another test.*
6 This isn't just another test. This is basic. This
7 is just a start, as far as I'm concerned.

8 DR. SPATARO: You know, I want to pass
9 the mike over to Ryan Kelly, who's going to read a
10 letter from Kirsten Baesler, Secretary of Education
11 of North Dakota, who passed and implemented the
12 legislation.

13 But before I mention that, Jay Leno --
14 I'm going to go back to Jay Leno for a second
15 because he really drove it home. At the end of our
16 gala event, in his little speech, he talked about
17 how disconcerting it was and how sad it was. And
18 after a while, he quit the gig. One of the reasons,
19 again, was because they wanted him to continue doing
20 this, but he felt really bad about doing it. He
21 said, *put these three words in front of all of those*
22 *answers, we the people, don't have a clue, if you*
23 *recall, we the people don't have any idea.*

24 Those are the people who are going to
25 govern our country in the decades to come, and

1 they're not learning what they need to learn right
2 now.

3 So Jay said this, and it was funny, but
4 it's scary. Again, we the people don't have a clue.
5 And we the people don't have any idea how to answer
6 these questions, and they're going to be taking over
7 this country.

8 I want to pass the mike over to Ryan --

9 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Okay. I was
10 going to ask you -- the letter is about two-pages
11 long. I'm trying to keep to the tight timetable
12 that we have.

13 DR. SPATARO: Okay.

14 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: We have five
15 other Representatives that would like to ask
16 questions.

17 DR. SPATARO: Okay.

18 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Could we get
19 through that and see if there's any time left
20 because we all have a copy of it, and we could read
21 it?

22 But I would ask you to just, if we get a
23 chance, maybe just refer to the most important parts
24 of the letter, if you could.

25 DR. SPATARO: Okay.

1 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: So let me run
2 out to Representative Schlossberg.

3 REPRESENTATIVE SCHLOSSBERG: Actually,
4 Representative Tobash asked my question.

5 So thank you.

6 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Great. Okay.
7 Good.

8 Representative Longietti, please.

9 REPRESENTATIVE LONGIETTI: Thank you,
10 all. And I'm a cosponsor of the bill and strongly
11 believe in it. Just a quick question or two.

12 First of all, so this is the exam that
13 they give for the U.S. citizenship test?

14 DR. SPATARO: Right.

15 REPRESENTATIVE LONGIETTI: Tell us a
16 little bit about how what we're proposing here
17 differs with the flexibility versus the U.S.
18 citizenship test.

19 DR. SPATARO: Between the test and
20 between this legislation?

21 REPRESENTATIVE LONGIETTI: Yes.

22 DR. SPATARO: So just in the Reader's
23 Digest version, the immigration test is a series of
24 10 questions of the 100 questions. So immigrants
25 are required to pass six of the 10, and they

1 continue on. If they pass six of the 10, they
2 become citizens and they go through the
3 naturalization celebration, but what we're asking
4 for is that our kids be able to pass all 100
5 questions.

6 Now, the immigrants, when they study,
7 they study all 100 questions because it's a
8 randomized test. So they could -- and 92 percent of
9 them pass it on the first go-round. So they study
10 this like it's the most important test of their
11 lives.

12 We bumped into the American Airlines gal
13 last night at American Airlines. We lost our
14 luggage. She's an immigrant from Ireland. And we
15 were telling her, *we're making an important*
16 *presentation tomorrow, so we need our clothes.* And
17 she kind of said, *well, what is it about,* and goes,
18 *we'll get those clothes to you for sure because I*
19 *passed that test. I want you to be able to make*
20 *that presentation tomorrow.* That's the key
21 difference.

22 And the other difference is that a lot of
23 the States are customizing this test a little bit.
24 They're raising the bar. In North Dakota, they
25 raised it to 70 percent from 60 because they thought

1 60 was too low, their kids should pass at 70. And
2 Ryan is going to talk a little bit about that in a
3 second.

4 So we're, again, not saying the test has
5 to be exactly the same. We think this is important,
6 100 questions about our country. It's, again, like
7 the multiplication tables, the alphabet, periodic
8 table. These are basic questions that you need to
9 know before you move on to a higher level of
10 reasoning and education. So those are the key
11 differences between the exam and between this test
12 and this legislation.

13 REPRESENTATIVE LONGIETTI: Just briefly,
14 with the diverse State that we have, is there any
15 concern about how the questions are worded or
16 formulated?

17 DR. SPATARO: Well, that's a good
18 question. We've been asked that question before.
19 This test, for example, is probably given to the
20 most diverse -- socially and economically diverse --
21 people ever, over the years. This is -- I don't
22 think you could ask for a more diverse population
23 taking a test.

24 REPRESENTATIVE LONGIETTI: Thank you, Mr.
25 Chairman.

1 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Great. Thank
2 you.

3 Representative Barbin.

4 REPRESENTATIVE BARBIN: Thank you.

5 (Inaudible - microphone malfunction)

6 The one question that I would have,
7 looking at that video is, are you registered to
8 vote? What I'm worried about on that video is the
9 same people that didn't have a clue aren't
10 registered to vote.

11 And my question is this, if you're going
12 to really do something and change the -- (Inaudible
13 - microphone malfunction) -- shouldn't we be looking
14 at eighth grade as opposed to high school?

15 Because if we taught them in eighth
16 grade, we'd save, in Pennsylvania alone, probably a
17 million people who might get registered to vote.

18 JUDGE RENDELL: I couldn't agree with you
19 more. I start in kindergarten, and we focus on
20 third, fourth and fifth grade. And they are able to
21 grasp these concepts. They're anxious. They're
22 raising their hand.

23 The difference between talking to a fifth
24 grader and a ninth grader is like night and day.
25 Fifth graders are like sponges, but we've got to

1 start somewhere. And let's capture the high school
2 students when we can, when we have them, before they
3 get to the university. And at least, as I said,
4 this is a start. This is a beginning.

5 But also, we do need to focus on primary
6 education. And I say even earlier than middle
7 school, but you're absolutely right. We've lost
8 these people, but let's at least, at least, capture
9 the high school students and then also encourage
10 awareness at an earlier stage. So I couldn't agree
11 with you more.

12 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Okay.

13 Representative Kim, please.

14 REPRESENTATIVE KIM: Yes, very quickly.

15 (Inaudible - microphone malfunction)

16 JUDGE RENDELL: That's a great idea.

17 And we have -- the Rendell Center has a
18 Teachers' Institute, where we bring teachers
19 together for a whole week and give them content
20 because so much of what they've done is methods, but
21 there is a great need. And I feel if you teach the
22 teachers, you're teaching multiple, multiple
23 students on a lot of levels, so I couldn't agree
24 with you more.

25 DR. SPARATO: Also, the Institute, as a

1 side point, we have the test online right now, so
2 you can all go take the test in about five minutes
3 or 10 minutes. You can take the 25-question
4 version, the 50-question version, or the
5 100-question. It gives you the responses right
6 there online, but we're also building an online
7 curriculum that goes along with the test. So that
8 will be ready next month, in October, and that
9 online curriculum will pop up.

10 So as a student is going through and
11 taking the test, as soon as he bumps into a question
12 he has a struggle with of some sort, it will slide
13 him over to the curriculum. He'll go through a
14 series of videos. He'll be asked a couple of
15 questions, and he can answer the questions there and
16 then pop back to the test and continue on with the
17 test. And teachers can use that as well as a
18 teaching tool.

19 A lot of teachers around the country are
20 helping us implement this curriculum. Right now, we
21 have 17 teachers that are providing us with
22 questions and scripts for the videos and that sort
23 of thing from States that have passed the
24 legislation already. So it will all go into effect
25 next month. So it's a tool. So for those boring

1 classes, they can just go take the online version.

2 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Would you be
3 angry with us if we amended this to mandate that our
4 Federal Congress be able to pass the same test?

5 DR. SPARATO: There you go. There you
6 go.

7 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Maybe they'd
8 learn something about the Tenth Amendment.

9 DR. SPARATO: Well, you know, in Arizona,
10 when they took this on, they asked a question every
11 day of the session to all of the legislators, and
12 they all answered it, and they had to raise their
13 hands. It was fun.

14 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Representative
15 Saccone.

16 That's going to get you in trouble.

17 REPRESENTATIVE SACCONE: Quickly, I just
18 want to make this comment.

19 I get so -- and I know we're going to
20 hear it here soon -- I get so tired of hearing about
21 teaching to the test and high-stakes testing. You
22 know, teaching to the test, that's a shame if we
23 have teachers teaching to the test.

24 You know, I teach college. I have since
25 1999. We have some of the most high-stakes testing

1 there is. We prepare students for the LSAT and the
2 MCAT and the GREs and all kinds of other tests. We
3 don't teach to those tests. We teach our material,
4 and those students pass that test, and that's how
5 we're evaluated. If we can't get people into law
6 school or medical school or graduate school, then
7 we're failing.

8 So you shouldn't be teaching to the test.
9 You should be teaching your material, and this is
10 important material that should be taught from Day
11 One, from kindergarten all the way through, and they
12 should know it. It shouldn't be something that they
13 even have to be worried about being tested on. It
14 should be common sense knowledge that they should
15 know. So I'm a huge supporter of this bill, and I
16 congratulate you and thank you for coming.

17 Thank you for your testimony today.

18 DR. SPATARO: Let me respond to that real
19 quick.

20 A lot of people who do pushback on this
21 will say that, that they're teaching to the test.
22 But what happens is, that is not giving teachers the
23 benefit of their experience and the doubt.
24 Typically, teachers do what you just said, they
25 teach all of the content related to this because

1 that's how kids will recall it all. So that's not a
2 good argument, and I appreciate you saying that
3 because that is a pushback that we get. And that's
4 not what's happening in schools at all.

5 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Thank you.

6 Representative English, probably our last
7 questioner unless someone --

8 REPRESENTATIVE ENGLISH: Thank you, Mr.
9 Chair.

10 Perhaps Texas Tech and all of our
11 Pennsylvania colleges and universities can have this
12 as a requirement for pre-admission.

13 I've looked at some of the testimony
14 coming up, and I'm troubled that Pennsylvania school
15 boards and Pennsylvania administrators kind of have
16 a little bit of a different twist, and they can
17 address it when they come up, but one says they're
18 opposed to high-stakes testing, which I really don't
19 think this is; and the other says this is not
20 designed for school-aged children, and it's not a
21 deep understanding of civics knowledge.

22 No, it's probably not, but again, it's
23 just the absolute, very basics.

24 DR. SPATARO: I agree.

25 REPRESENTATIVE ENGLISH: So let's be a

1 leader here in Pennsylvania. Let's start this.
2 Let's make this a requirement. From the Education
3 Committee, we always feel we have a substitute --
4 I'm sorry. We always feel we have a shortage of
5 teachers.

6 Well, how about the members of the
7 American Legion could volunteer; how about VFW; how
8 about Reservists; how about retirees from the
9 military?

10 They could probably sit in the class and
11 fill that shortage and just, you know, go over these
12 little basic questions that are not high-stakes
13 testing and are not designed to have a deep
14 understanding of civics knowledge, but it is basic.

15 Also, from the Tourism Committee, you
16 know, this is a hotbed. We're enriched with
17 historical and patriotic history here. You know,
18 maybe, just maybe, if we're a leader and we start
19 other States to follow this, more people will travel
20 to Pennsylvania and bring those magic R and D words,
21 revenue and dollars, to the State of Pennsylvania.

22 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

23 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Do Marines
24 have to pass this test when they go in?

25 REPRESENTATIVE ENGLISH: Absolutely.

1 We're leaders.

2 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Representative
3 Kortz.

4 REPRESENTATIVE KORTZ: Thank you, Mr.
5 Chairman. Very briefly.

6 Thank you, Judge Rendell. And thank you,
7 Dr. Spataro, for your testimony today. I wanted to
8 come back to the map that you showed, Dr. Spataro.

9 If I look at this correctly, there are 14
10 States now that have passed this and enacted it.

11 DR. SPATARO: Correct.

12 REPRESENTATIVE KORTZ: And now there's 22
13 more that are looking at it.

14 DR. SPATARO: Yes.

15 REPRESENTATIVE KORTZ: And just since
16 June, that's five more States, since the last time
17 we talked.

18 DR. SPATARO: Since June -- Missouri just
19 signed it into law a month and a half ago, and
20 Governor Ducey and Governor Nixon from Missouri are
21 now calling on all of the Governors from all of the
22 States that are on this list here in green and just
23 called Nebraska. So they're advocating for it.
24 That's a bipartisan sort of approach, and they are
25 also testifying on behalf of this legislation. At

1 the Governor's Association meeting last summer and
2 this fall, we'll all be speaking on this as one of
3 the top ten legislative initiatives of 2017.

4 REPRESENTATIVE KORTZ: Thank you.

5 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

6 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Our last
7 question is from Representative McCarter.

8 REPRESENTATIVE McCARTER: Thank you, Mr.
9 Chairman.

10 I just have a question because I was
11 looking down the list of testifiers, and I didn't
12 see anyone from the Department of Education here in
13 Pennsylvania. So maybe you can help me with this.
14 In the States that have passed this already or are
15 considering it, have any of them taken into
16 consideration the needs of special education
17 students in terms of how they were addressed in
18 terms of this exam?

19 DR. SPATARO: Yes, they have. And as I
20 mentioned earlier, a lot of the States are passing
21 legislation as we're asking it to be passed, and
22 some are customizing it, leaving exceptions, like
23 for example, a special needs situation or a
24 home-schooled student. So it's up to the State on
25 how they want to modify and customize this. Again,

1 our goal is to put civics back on the front burner,
2 make it as strong as possible so it has teeth in it,
3 so kids feel it's an important test that they're
4 required to take. And then if there are some
5 exceptions, the States are able to make those
6 exceptions.

7 REPRESENTATIVE McCARTER: Thank you.

8 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: We'll move on
9 to our next panel.

10 Thank you for your time being here today
11 and your testimony.

12 DR. SPATARO: Thank you.

13 JUDGE RENDELL: Thank you.

14 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: The letter
15 that was referenced by Dr. Spataro is in your
16 packet. I'd ask the members to take a quick look at
17 it, if you could. Okay.

18 Our next panelists are Mr. Thomas A.
19 Brown, State Commander Veteran of Foreign Wars, and
20 Mr. Carl Olshefskie -- did I say that right --
21 Department Commander of American Legions.

22 Thank you, gentlemen. If you'd take a
23 seat up here. And please, when you speak into the
24 microphone, try to pull it close to you, if you can.
25 Okay.

1 And you can begin your testimony when
2 you're ready.

3 How do I say your last name?

4 Did I butcher it really bad?

5 COMMANDER BROWN: Good morning to the
6 leadership and members of the Pennsylvania House
7 Education and House Veterans Affairs Committees.

8 I am Thomas Brown, Swarthmore,
9 Pennsylvania. I am the State Commander of
10 Pennsylvania for Veterans of Foreign Wars. I'm a
11 Korean Veteran. I represent the VFW organization
12 that has 85,000 members who served in combat zones,
13 special operations areas, and the UN peacekeeping
14 theaters.

15 Our State and Nation were founded on some
16 very important principles that have stood the test
17 of time. From the very first days of America's
18 independence, these key principles shaped our
19 country's government to become the most free and
20 representative nation on earth, and these principles
21 remain true and strong during periods of tremendous
22 growth in population, industry, technology, economy
23 and military service.

24 These principles are not just mere words
25 on paper. Our Founding Fathers exerted great effort

1 and emotion in defining how America differs from
2 other nations. These statements provide a living,
3 breathing philosophy of freedom that works for
4 citizens with varied backgrounds. These words weave
5 together a framework for freedom that has endured
6 for 240 years since our independence was declared.

7 In fact, the uniqueness of our nation's
8 structure has created the longest-surviving
9 democracy on the face of this earth. That is why
10 the Veterans of Foreign Wars strongly supports HB
11 1858. We thank the prime and secondary sponsors for
12 this bill for realizing that to preserve America's
13 history, our citizens soon old enough to vote should
14 have a basic understanding about how their lives and
15 the lives of millions of Americans are impacted by
16 our form of government.

17 One of the Veterans of Foreign Wars'
18 student scholarship programs, called the Voice of
19 Democracy, clearly shows the value of educating
20 teenagers about American history and the
21 responsibility citizens have to uphold our nation.

22 By spending a little time doing research
23 about our nation and writing a short speech to enter
24 into this scholarship program, high school students
25 express their understanding about America's unique

1 governing structure and why it should be preserved.

2 Here are a few quotes from the first
3 place national winner of our Voice of Democracy
4 contest. He said, and I quote, *I was born into
5 freedom, and I have been afforded rights and
6 opportunities that so many around the world will
7 never experience. What I wasn't born into was the
8 heart of an American. My patriot's heart journey
9 began many years ago, when I was a young middle
10 school student attending a Veterans Day ceremony.
11 At a veterans' event, I watched an old veteran take
12 off his veteran's cap, place it in his hand, place
13 it over his heart and stand in front of Old Glory,
14 and why tears filled his eyes as the speaker talked
15 about World War II.*

16 *By studying history, my heart for this
17 country transformed as I learned about how our
18 country was woven from threads spun from conflicts
19 and how our nation was built on the backs of those
20 who sacrificed much and carried the colors for all
21 of us.*

22 This high school student continued,
23 saying, *my vision for America is that each citizen
24 of this outstanding nation will have a patriot's
25 heart. For a patriot's heart knows and appreciates*

1 *our history and will never want to forget how we got*
2 *there or on whose shoulders we stand. A patriot's*
3 *heart knows what our flag stands for and will not*
4 *dare sit down when Old Glory is presented. A*
5 *patriot's heart loves this country, defends its*
6 *liberty, seeks the greater good, and will never*
7 *allow our God-given, inalienable rights to be*
8 *restricted. A patriot's heart realizes the*
9 *sacrifices that it took to make our nation great and*
10 *will never allow those who have defended our freedom*
11 *to be forgotten. That is why my vision for America*
12 *is that each citizen of this great nation will have*
13 *a patriot's heart because then, just like in*
14 *generations past, we will be able to overcome any*
15 *struggle.*

16 The student ended the speech by quoting
17 President Ronald Reagan, *freedom is never more than*
18 *one generation from extinction; we didn't pass it to*
19 *our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought*
20 *for, protected, and handed on to them to do the*
21 *same.*

22 As veterans and lawmakers, we must
23 recognize that patriotism and American history do
24 not get automatically passed down through the
25 bloodstream. Therefore, we must make a concerted

1 effort to elevate high school students' knowledge of
2 the important aspects of our history. This will
3 help us to graduate students who have the knowledge
4 and hopefully a patriot's heart to be responsible
5 and active citizens. Knowledge is the lifeblood of
6 any ideal worth pursuing and protecting. That
7 knowledge and the knowledge of the schemes that
8 freedom's enemies force upon us is what emboldened
9 and inspired men and women to risk their lives
10 defending America.

11 Veterans shed their blood and gave their
12 lives to show their loyalty to their nation.
13 Today's troops leave family and the comforts of home
14 behind to stand on the shoulders of those veterans
15 to serve the greater good of protecting America.

16 I cannot imagine students graduating high
17 school without knowing American history, our
18 government structure and basic geography.

19 Will they ever know how special our
20 governing structure is?

21 Will they consider following in your
22 footsteps as lawmakers to maintain and build our
23 democratic heritage?

24 Will they see America as worth defending?

25 Graduating seniors with a basic

1 understanding of our history, our government and the
2 land we love will create a desire to not only
3 preserve America, but to improve our country. Some
4 students may be so inspired by these key ideals that
5 they will include themselves in public service in
6 the future. Some will hold these principles so
7 close that they will be willing to join our Armed
8 Forces to defend the nation they want to preserve.

9 Lastly, if we require immigrants going
10 through the legal process of becoming Americans to
11 pass an examination about civics and citizenship,
12 why would we not make sure our graduates have the
13 same knowledge?

14 Ensuring a promising future for Americans
15 will require citizens to accept and embrace roles as
16 leaders, public servants and protectors. Let's give
17 them the knowledge that inspires service and
18 develops patriotic hearts.

19 Please support and pass Bill 1858. The
20 VFW thanks you.

21 COMMANDER OLSHEFSKIE: Good morning,
22 ladies and gentlemen of the House of Representatives
23 Education Committee.

24 I am Carl Olshefskie, Commander of The
25 American Legion, Department of Pennsylvania. Our

1 organization is the largest veterans' service
2 organization in the country and the State of
3 Pennsylvania with over 2,000,000 members nationally.
4 Here in Pennsylvania, we number over 156,000.

5 In 1919, the American Legion was founded
6 on four pillars: veterans' affairs and
7 rehabilitation, national security, Americanism, and
8 youth. The third precept of our Preamble to our
9 Constitution is to foster and perpetuate a one
10 hundred percent Americanism.

11 One of our resolutions from our National
12 Convention in 1984 stated that the youth of America
13 were not receiving adequate instruction in the
14 responsibilities of loyal patriotic citizenship of
15 the United States of America, and that the
16 immigrants seeking United States citizenship are
17 required to have a more sincere knowledge of
18 those same responsibilities.

19 We believe that native-born citizens
20 should have at least as complete an
21 understanding of their responsibilities of
22 citizenship as a newly naturalized citizen.
23 We recommend that successful completion of a final
24 comprehensive examination regarding citizenship
25 responsibilities be required for graduation from

1 high school or equivalent GED certificates.

2 Through Title 46, Section 106 of the
3 United States Code, civil and educational
4 authorities of States, counties, cities, and towns
5 are urged to make plans for the
6 proper observance and for the complete instruction
7 of citizens in their responsibilities and
8 opportunities as United States citizens and as
9 citizens of their communities.

10 Thank you for this opportunity to present
11 our position to you.

12 I would like to thank all veterans of the
13 Committee for their service.

14 Thank you.

15 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Thank you for
16 being here today. We're really glad to see the VFW
17 and the veterans' service organizations on board
18 with this legislation.

19 For the members out there, we also have a
20 letter that was submitted from the American Legion
21 in full support of this legislation also. And then
22 there's another letter from the Pennsylvania Elks
23 State Association, another non-profit group.

24 Okay. Questions from the members?

25 Do we have any questions in the front

1 here?

2 Do any of our members have questions?

3 How about behind us, gentlemen, ladies?

4 Representative Kortz.

5 REPRESENTATIVE KORTZ: Thank you, Mr.

6 Chairman.

7 Commander Brown, Commander Olshefskie,
8 first let me thank you for your service to our
9 country. God bless you both for what you've done to
10 defend America.

11 Thank you for being here today, for your
12 testimony.

13 Commander Brown, that letter you read,
14 the Voice of Democracy, that was very, very special.
15 I can understand why he was the winner. I mean, he
16 hit the nail on the head. Thank you for sharing
17 that with us.

18 COMMANDER BROWN: Thank you.

19 REPRESENTATIVE KORTZ: Thank you, Mr.

20 Chairman.

21 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Thank you.

22 If I can ask a question, how much access
23 are groups like yours, the veterans' service
24 organizations, are you given access to our public
25 schools? Do you have any type of programs where you

1 go into the public schools and talk about these
2 types of issues?

3 COMMANDER BROWN: We have approximately
4 25 direct programs that go into the schools, from
5 teaching flags to teaching etiquette, and even
6 political structures of the House, Senate and so
7 forth because, you know, we're disciplined under
8 your structure. We respect you and represent we are
9 your people, veterans, the Commander-in-chief, all
10 the way down the line to local politician.

11 Just this weekend, we had at our local
12 post, and we invited the schools, Senator McCain and
13 Senator Toomey attended my local post. And that's
14 the lowest level that we have in the VFW, is our
15 actual post. So we work with you, and we try to
16 work very thoroughly with you. And you're aware of
17 that because I've worked with you, and John Getz,
18 our adjutant quartermaster is here. And sitting
19 next to him will be the Commander for the State of
20 Pennsylvania next year, and he was the chairman for
21 the Voice of Democracy for Pennsylvania for 15
22 years.

23 I asked him about how many we get on an
24 average. We get about 4,000 entries per year for
25 our Voice of Democracy. So we, the American Legion,

1 and ourselves, we are constantly in schools and
2 trying to teach these things. And this taught me
3 something by having to appear in front of you
4 gentlemen today. I'm not a young man anymore, and I
5 thought how did I learn so much that I learned? The
6 one Representative that left, he made a good
7 comment, and it dawned on me -- and we don't have it
8 today. I was a paperboy during World War II, and I
9 can tell you all the battles and I can tell you
10 everything that went on because as I folded those
11 papers and delivered them door to door, you read
12 them, and you did not realize that you were
13 educating yourself, like you mentioned about having
14 it in the school structure.

15 I look at this, and this is wonderful.
16 This is only a brick in the building that's got to
17 be made.

18 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Right.

19 COMMANDER BROWN: I go back -- I go back
20 70 years now, so I'm a different generation. You've
21 lost a lot.

22 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: I understand.

23 COMMANDER BROWN: Not you, but we have.

24 That's why we work so hard, the veterans.
25 We work so hard. We gave our lives, and many of

1 them did. Now, we're giving our lives and doing
2 what we're trying to do.

3 Thank you, sir.

4 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Thank you.

5 COMMANDER OLSHEFSKIE: The American
6 Legion also has many programs, both national and in
7 the State, that we promote. One of them is our
8 Oratorical Program, which is held right next door,
9 over at The Forum. The finals are held there the
10 second weekend in March. If any of you gentlemen or
11 ladies would like to come over, you'll see our three
12 top candidates in the State, vying for over 18,500
13 in scholarship money, speaking on the Constitution.

14 If you want to see something that's
15 really impressive, there are some students out there
16 that study it. The schools, unfortunately, we get
17 very little participation. You know, we might only
18 start with 40 students statewide and whittle it down
19 to those last three, but every school is given that
20 opportunity to enter students in that contest.

21 That's the Oratorical.

22 Our KBS Program, we're here every summer,
23 the fourth week in June, with our KBS group from
24 Shippensburg University, where the 250 high school
25 junior boys, approximately, last year, study

1 government. They study government from the city
2 level on Monday night, right up to electing a
3 Governor, who goes, of course, to Boys Nation the
4 following week, but these programs are presented to
5 the schools and it's tough to get them to
6 participate, very tough.

7 Where I grew up, we had a KBS; and a GS,
8 Girls State, was appointed every year from every
9 junior class. That was mandated. That had to be.
10 At that time, I was a young, young fellow. I didn't
11 even know what it was, to tell you the truth.

12 But they're both impressive programs and
13 they support our pillars of the American Legion,
14 under our Americanism and children and youth.

15 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Thank you.

16 Representative Barbin.

17 REPRESENTATIVE BARBIN: I just wanted to
18 follow up your question.

19 (Inaudible - microphone malfunction)

20 Do they go back to the school and do
21 anything after Boys State or Girls State?

22 COMMANDER OLSHEFSKIE: This year, we've
23 been encouraging the students to follow that up and
24 ask them -- ask any of them. It's a little better
25 now because we have e-mails, and we can contact

1 those students after they leave.

2 Years ago, when you went, you know, they
3 would have to send you a letter and ask you to, you
4 know, talk it up for them, but now we can do this
5 electronically, and it has improved our program the
6 last three or four years.

7 REPRESENTATIVE BARBIN: They'd be a great
8 speaker --

9 COMMANDER OLSHEFSKIE: Oh, yeah.

10 REPRESENTATIVE BARBIN: -- to explain
11 what that test is about.

12 (Inaudible - microphone malfunctioned)

13 COMMANDER OLSHEFSKIE: All right. Thank
14 you.

15 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: It would
16 certainly be nice to see an increase in
17 participation from our schools in these programs.

18 Representative Hill.

19 REPRESENTATIVE HILL: Thank you.

20 Gentlemen, thank you. A little unusual
21 setup here today. There are so many of us here in
22 this room.

23 Thank you so much for your service and
24 for our freedom.

25 Thank you, as well, to the American

1 Legion. I attended Girls State, and it was really
2 an amazing opportunity that I'm very grateful for to
3 this day.

4 Chairman Saylor and I share a school
5 district that has a rather unique program. We
6 believe that it's probably the only one in
7 Pennsylvania that was brought to the school
8 district. It's right along the Maryland line by the
9 American Legion in Maryland, and it's called the
10 Patriot Program.

11 Are you familiar with this program?

12 COMMANDER OLSHEFSKIE: I am not. No.

13 REPRESENTATIVE HILL: You're not. Okay.

14 I mean, we could -- we don't have a
15 tremendous amount of time. We could sit here and
16 probably both extol its virtues.

17 It is wildly popular in the southeastern
18 school district. Over 50 percent of all of our
19 students from first grade through sixth grade
20 participate. The Legion provides the start-up and
21 the training materials, and the parents run the
22 program. Those students, what they know about our
23 country is truly, truly inspiring.

24 I would love to be able to connect you to
25 those folks in Maryland because it really is a great

1 model for what could be done across the
2 Commonwealth. Not mandated, voluntary, but it is
3 incredibly embraced and is really helping to create
4 those citizens of the future with the virtues that
5 the Legion is looking for.

6 So I would love to be able to make that
7 connection because I think that might be an
8 excellent place to start this whole education
9 process.

10 So thank you.

11 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Thank you.

12 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SAYLOR: Gentlemen, I
13 want to thank you for coming today and testifying.

14 I also participated in an American Legion
15 program when I was in tenth grade. We were up at
16 Fort Indiantown Gap at that time. I remember that
17 far back. It's a long time ago.

18 Thanks, Steve.

19 But again, it's great with the programs
20 that you guys do, and I want to thank you for coming
21 and testifying today.

22 We'll get our next panel up here.

23 Thank you, gentlemen.

24 COMMANDER BROWN: Thank you, sir.

25 COMMANDER OLSHEFSKIE: Thank you.

1 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Thank you.

2 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SAYLOR: Our next panel
3 to testify today is Dr. Paul Healey, the Executive
4 Director of the Pennsylvania Principals Association;
5 John Callahan, who is the Assistant Executive
6 Director of the Pennsylvania School Boards
7 Association.

8 Lee Ann Wentzel, who is Superintendent of
9 the Ridley School District. She's testifying on
10 behalf of the Pennsylvania Association of School
11 Administrators.

12 Also, we have Jerry -- Jerry, I always
13 screw up your name.

14 MR. OLEKSIK: You do.

15 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SAYLOR: Could you --

16 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: That's why I
17 let you do it.

18 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SAYLOR: Yes.

19 I always screw up his name, no matter how
20 many times I introduce him. He's a great guy from
21 the Pennsylvania Education Association.

22 Thank you for coming, gentlemen and
23 ladies.

24 You may start. I don't know what order
25 you're starting in, but you may start when you're

1 all situated.

2 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Can I make a
3 quick comment before we start?

4 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SAYLOR: Go ahead.

5 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: Ms. Wentzel,
6 our intern for our Committee is also a Ridley
7 graduate.

8 I'm an Interboro grad, but her school,
9 her school district that she's Superintendent of,
10 beat my school in football for 24 straight years,
11 but now we win once in a while. So we got better in
12 everything.

13 I won't hold that against you. So if I
14 get mean in my testimony, it probably has more to do
15 with Ridley than the subject matter.

16 Thanks for being here.

17 MR. OLEKSIAK: Good morning, Chairman
18 Saylor, Chairman Roebuck, Chairman Barrar, Chairman
19 Sainato, and members of the House Education
20 Committee and House Veterans Affairs and Emergency
21 Preparedness Committee.

22 My name is Jerry Oleksiak, and I'm the
23 President of the Pennsylvania State Education
24 Association. Thank you for inviting me to testify
25 today on behalf of PSEA and our 180,000 members to

1 share our perspective on HB 1858, civic education,
2 and the impact of high-stakes testing on students,
3 educators and schools.

4 Prior to serving as a statewide officer
5 with PSEA, I was a special education teacher for
6 over three decades working primarily in the Upper
7 Merion Area School District and the Montgomery
8 County Intermediate Unit.

9 I would add parenthetically that I was
10 also certified in social studies. My degree is in
11 international relations. I always wanted to teach
12 history and government, and I did do some of that.
13 So I come to it from that perspective, as well.

14 The years of experience I've had,
15 combined with my leadership and involvement in
16 statewide policy on behalf of PSEA, have further
17 strengthened my belief that Pennsylvania's students
18 are among the best and brightest in the nation and
19 truly are our future. As our future, it is critical
20 that they are fully prepared to be engaged citizens
21 in our democracy. As I mentioned, social studies --
22 I was also certified in social studies. It was my
23 favorite subject in school, as well.

24 When done correctly, civic learning not
25 only helps our democracy flourish, but also builds

1 critical skills that our students need to succeed in
2 their professional and personal life, as we've
3 heard, skills such as: critical thinking, problem
4 solving, communication, collaboration, creativity,
5 and the importance of initiative and innovation.
6 Good civic education begins with clear academic
7 standards, a knowledgeable, well-prepared teacher
8 and engaging activities, which not only convey
9 knowledge, but ignite enthusiasm. Good education
10 cannot be reduced to an exit test. And as we have
11 seen in the context of federal policy, testing can
12 sometimes stifle good instruction.

13 PSEA agrees with Representative Kortz and
14 the other sponsors of HB 1858 that Pennsylvania can
15 and should do more to meet the goal of increasing
16 our students' understanding of how government works
17 and better prepare them to be engaged citizens in
18 our democracy. We disagree that another test is the
19 answer, and we therefore oppose HB 1858.

20 Adding another high-stakes test that
21 could serve as a barrier for a student to graduate
22 regardless of their performance and achievements
23 throughout their academic career does a disservice
24 to the very students we are trying to engage.
25 Despite the best efforts of educators, a high-stakes

1 test with graduation in the balance will drive their
2 instruction and, unfortunately, limit the sort of
3 creativity, engagement and enthusiasm that is so
4 important to student learning.

5 HB 1858 needs to be considered as part of
6 a comprehensive conversation around graduation
7 requirements reflected in the report that PDE just
8 released and that was required by SB 880. For that
9 discussion, we would defer to the report, which PSEA
10 supports.

11 Additionally, we applaud Chairman Saylor
12 for his leadership in advancing the amendment to
13 require PDE to conduct a study on graduation
14 requirements.

15 It appeared that after the unanimous
16 passage of SB 880 there was a growing consensus
17 among policymakers, parents and educators that we
18 want less of an emphasis on testing and more time
19 spent on learning in our classrooms. Frankly, I am
20 surprised that policymakers are now interested in
21 debating the need for a fourth graduation exit exam,
22 particularly when no Federal law requires the
23 additional test.

24 In fact, this legislation would force
25 Pennsylvania's students to exceed testing

1 requirements under the new Every Student Succeeds
2 Act.

3 I want to reiterate what I constantly
4 hear from the thousands of educators PSEA
5 represents. This should be news to no one on the
6 Committees because you've heard me say this before.

7 It's time to move beyond toxic testing.
8 The research is clear. Attaching high stakes to a
9 test has negative consequences for students.
10 High-stakes exit exams are associated with increased
11 dropout rates, narrowed curricula, decreases in
12 student motivation to learn, and disproportionate
13 harm to some of our most vulnerable students, those
14 living in poverty, minority students, English
15 language learners, and special needs students.

16 The narrowing of instruction and loss of
17 instructional time in response to high-stakes
18 testing has had a significant impact on the ability
19 of schools to invest time, resources and other
20 supports for social studies, specifically civic
21 learning. Adding another high-stakes test is not
22 the way to accomplish the shared goal -- and I would
23 emphasize it's a shared goal -- of increasing civic
24 knowledge, skills and values among our students.

25 Instead, we must focus on how to help our

1 schools expand student learning in such a way that
2 does not further erode the subject areas that have
3 been marginalized by high-stakes testing.

4 To that end, PSEA offers the following
5 recommendations for your Committees' consideration
6 as you continue deliberations about helping prepare
7 students for civic participation. The
8 recommendations are detailed and lengthy, and they
9 are included in our written comments.

10 PSEA stands ready to work with you and
11 others on efforts to ensure high quality civic
12 learning in our schools. We all benefit when our
13 students and each of us have a better grounding in
14 our nation's history, government and politics. It
15 is important for our students to understand the
16 origins of this country and our founding documents.

17 Every time I taught social studies, it
18 included a dramatic reading of the Declaration of
19 Independence. So I understand the need for this.

20 Perhaps even more important than knowing
21 these facts is their ability to apply the civic
22 values and skills espoused by our Founding Fathers
23 and Mothers in their personal and professional life.
24 I am certain, however, that adding another test is
25 not going to ensure that occurs.

1 Thank you all for the opportunity to
2 offer comments this morning. And I will be happy to
3 answer any of your questions.

4 Thank you.

5 MS. WENTZEL: Good morning, distinguished
6 chairmen and members of the Education and Veterans
7 Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committees.

8 My name is Lee Ann Wentzel. I am here
9 today representing the Pennsylvania Association of
10 School Administrators, PASA, whose members include
11 the school district superintendents and other public
12 school system leaders from across Pennsylvania.

13 I serve as Superintendent of Ridley
14 School District in Delaware County. And prior to
15 serving as an administrator, I was, too, a social
16 studies teacher, as was my father before me.

17 PASA strongly supports proven and
18 effective policies, programs and initiatives that
19 will strengthen and build upon Pennsylvania's
20 long-standing tradition of preparing students for
21 their responsibilities and obligations of
22 citizenship through high-quality civic learning
23 opportunities. This is embodied in the Statement of
24 Purpose of Public Education by the State Board of
25 Education that states, *public education*

1 *prepares students for adult life by attending to*
2 *their intellectual and developmental needs and*
3 *challenging them to achieve at their highest level*
4 *possible. In conjunction with families and other*
5 *community institutions, public education prepares*
6 *students to become self-directed life-long learners*
7 *and responsible, involved citizens.*

8 School districts across our State,
9 including my own, make civic education a fundamental
10 part of their mission. It is the mission of the
11 Ridley School District to create a caring
12 environment that gives all students the opportunity
13 to achieve their fullest personal and academic
14 potential in order to become productive and
15 responsible citizens.

16 PASA does not believe that adding another
17 high-stakes state-mandated standardized test to the
18 17 that are already currently required is wise, when
19 precisely at the same time the Secretary of
20 Education and Education Committees are in the midst
21 of discussions around the future role and stakes
22 associated with the Keystone Exams, which when
23 funded, includes a civics and government exam, is
24 reason enough to set aside HB 1858.

25 In addition, given ongoing discussions

1 and planning for implementation of the
2 new federal Every Student Succeeds Act, which
3 includes designs for student and school
4 accountability, consideration of such major policy
5 changes should be incorporated into those
6 discussions. The argument that other States have
7 enacted this strategy into law so we should, too, is
8 often a reason to step back, particularly when these
9 actions have taken place relatively recently and
10 their long-term impacts and unintended consequences
11 have yet to be revealed.

12 We caution the Committees that
13 following in the footsteps of other States is not
14 always a prudent course of action. End-of-course
15 high school graduation tests were enacted by 28
16 other States before Pennsylvania created the
17 Keystone Exams. Since Pennsylvania created the
18 Keystone Exams, 10 States have eliminated and many
19 others have reduced their high-stakes end-of-course
20 testing requirements for high school graduation.

21 We suggest taking a step back from the
22 requirements of HB 1858 before once again following
23 the States down the wrong path. We do not believe
24 the National Assessment of Educational Progress,
25 NAEP, nationwide civics assessment results that are

1 often used to portray students in each State as not
2 possessing fundamental knowledge of our system of
3 government, comes close to reflecting Pennsylvania
4 students' civic knowledge.

5 Because NAEP civics test results, which
6 is based on a small sample of students tested across
7 the nation, are not reported state-by-state, we must
8 use other nationally administered tests to show
9 that Pennsylvania students perform far better than
10 students in other States. One such example is that
11 Pennsylvania students who take the SAT subject
12 matter test in U.S. history outperformed students
13 nationwide by 16 points on the SAT 800-point scale.

14 Similarly, the more than 20,000
15 Pennsylvania students who in 2015 took the highly
16 rigorous advanced placement courses in U.S.
17 government and politics and U.S. history, which is
18 offered in more than 800 Pennsylvania public and
19 private schools, outperformed students from across
20 the nation. On the 5-point scale used by the
21 College Board, Pennsylvania students' average score
22 was 2.76 versus 2.54 for students nationwide. In
23 U.S. history, Pennsylvania students' average score
24 was 2.92 versus 2.64 for students nationwide. The
25 2016 Ridley High School results showed the average

1 of 3.5 on the government exam and 3.205 average for
2 U.S. history.

3 The percentage of Pennsylvania students
4 who score a 3 or higher on these Advanced Placement
5 tests, the level at which they may be awarded
6 college credit, far exceeds that of students across
7 the nation, with 57 percent of Pennsylvania students
8 scoring 3 or higher on the U.S. government and
9 politics test, while the percentage of students who
10 do so nationwide is 48 percent. The percentage of
11 Pennsylvania students scoring 3 or higher on U.S.
12 history is 61 percent, which is a ten-percentage
13 point higher performance than students nationwide.

14 We believe there are several reasons why
15 Pennsylvania students' civic knowledge and skills
16 generally exceed that of students across the nation.
17 Pennsylvania is the Disney World of national and
18 State historic sites associated with the founding
19 development of our nation. One cannot turn a corner
20 in our State without seeing a historic marker,
21 plaque, or historic site that notes a significant
22 event or person associated with our nation's
23 founding and development. Our students are
24 fortunate to live and be educated in a State blessed
25 with a rich heritage and traditions that are

1 unmatched among the other 50 States.

2 In addition to the hundreds of Federal,
3 State and private historic sites, most significant
4 of which is Independence National Park, dubbed the
5 most historic square mile in America, our State is
6 home to unmatched museums and educational resources
7 throughout our State such as the historic York
8 County Courthouse, Fort Necessity, Fort Pitt, Brig
9 Niagara, Valley Forge, Heinz History Center,
10 Gettysburg Battlefield and dozens more.

11 In addition, Pennsylvania is home to two
12 of the premier institutions that work directly with
13 schools to educate and support civic learning, the
14 National Constitution Center and the Leonore
15 Annenberg Institute for Civics, which is based at
16 the University of Pennsylvania.

17 Given this rich history, Pennsylvania
18 public schools have long embraced that it is their
19 mission and responsibility to prepare students for
20 their role as active, engaged citizens. This charge
21 is perhaps best spelled out by two paragraphs in the
22 Pennsylvania Public School Code.

23 *In every elementary, public and private*
24 *school established and maintained in this*
25 *Commonwealth, the following subjects shall be*

1 *taught, the history of the United States of*
2 *Pennsylvania, civics, including loyalty to the State*
3 *and national government.*

4 *During grades seven through twelve*
5 *inclusive, there shall be included at least four*
6 *semesters or equivalent study in the history and*
7 *government of that portion of America which has*
8 *become the United States of America, and of the*
9 *Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, of such nature, kind*
10 *or quality, as to have for its purpose the*
11 *developing, teaching and presentation of the*
12 *principles and ideals of the American*
13 *republican representative form of government as*
14 *portrayed and experienced by the acts and policies*
15 *of the framers of the Declaration of Independence*
16 *and the framers of the Constitution of the United*
17 *States and the Bill of Rights. The study of the*
18 *history of the United States, including the study of*
19 *the Constitution of the United States, and the study*
20 *of the history and Constitution of this*
21 *Commonwealth, shall also be such as will emphasize*
22 *the good, worthwhile and best features and points of*
23 *the social, economic and cultural development, the*
24 *growth of the American family life, high standard of*
25 *living of the United States citizen, the privileges*

1 *enjoyed by such citizens, their heritage and its*
2 *derivations of and in our principles of government.*

3 *Such instruction shall have for its*
4 *purpose also the instilling into every*
5 *boy and girl who comes out of our public, private*
6 *and parochial schools their solemn duty and*
7 *obligation to exercise intelligently their voting*
8 *privilege and to understand the advantages of the*
9 *American republican form of government as compared*
10 *with various forms of government.*

11 These statutory provisions which outline
12 current instructional requirements in Pennsylvania's
13 elementary and secondary schools are contained in
14 Sections 1511 and 1605 of the Public School Code.
15 The Pennsylvania General Assembly enacted them 105
16 years ago, in 1911, as Public Law 309.

17 Together with State Board of Education
18 instructional requirements, State academic standards
19 and State and local testing requirements, which I
20 will summarize in a moment, this establishes the
21 framework for school district curriculum,
22 instructional programming, assessment and graduation
23 credit requirements.

24 State Board of Education Chapter 4
25 regulations require instruction in social studies at

1 the elementary every year and that this include
2 planned instruction in U.S. history, Pennsylvania
3 history, geography and civics at least once by the
4 end of elementary school. The State Board requires
5 instruction in social studies, civics and
6 government, economics, geography and history,
7 including the history and cultures of the United
8 States, the Commonwealth, and the world, be provided
9 to every student every year at the middle school
10 level.

11 At the high school level, the Board
12 requires that instruction be provided to every
13 student in social studies, civics and government,
14 economics, geography and history, including the
15 history and cultures of the United States, the
16 Commonwealth, and the world.

17 State academic standards in civics and
18 government -- which those copies have been attached
19 U.S. and world history, geography and economics
20 provide a framework for expectations on which
21 district curriculum, instructional
22 programming and assessments are based.

23 As with the nine academic disciplines
24 other than reading, math and science, in which the
25 State does not measure student achievement through

1 use of a single standardized test, the assessment of
2 student proficiency in social studies is performed
3 at the district or school level.

4 State law and regulations provide minimum
5 requirements for school districts to provide a
6 comprehensive instructional program in the four
7 primary social studies that the district may expand
8 and build upon by requiring successful completion of
9 course or credit attainment. Pennsylvania students
10 average 3.7 years of study in social studies at the
11 high school level.

12 Like other schools in Pennsylvania,
13 Ridley High School exceeds these minimum
14 requirements and offers a rich social science
15 elective program. In fact, 78 percent of the 2015
16 graduating class took a senior elective of either AP
17 U.S. government or senior issues, which is a
18 civics-based course in which students learn to write
19 legislation and participate in a mock Congress.
20 Pennsylvania's long-standing instructional
21 requirements and programs are working well in
22 preparing students for their responsibilities and
23 obligations of citizenship.

24 The naturalization test developed and
25 administered by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration

1 Services is just one small element of a multi-part,
2 lengthy screening process used to determine whether
3 an individual is worthy of being granted U.S.
4 citizenship. Unlike HB 1858, which requires
5 students to correctly answer at least 60 of 100
6 questions, applicants for U.S. citizenship are
7 administered the test as an oral test and must only
8 answer six out of 10 questions correctly in order to
9 pass the civics portion of the naturalization test.

10 The naturalization test is not designed
11 for school-aged students. It drives rote
12 memorization, not a deep understanding of civic
13 knowledge or practices. It is designed as a
14 screening tool, a purpose completely
15 distinct from that of a high-stakes high school
16 graduation test.

17 HB 1858 seeks to use an
18 inappropriate instrument for the stated objective of
19 improving civic knowledge of Pennsylvania
20 students. The naturalization test is designed,
21 administered and scored such that it tests the
22 short-term memory facts and canned responses rather
23 than a full or deep understanding of our system of
24 government, nor does it assess the skills or
25 dispositions necessary for citizens to practice good

1 citizenship.

2 United States Citizenship and Immigration
3 services clearly states on the publicly available
4 practice test, *although the USCIS is aware that*
5 *there may be additional correct answers to the 100*
6 *civics questions, applicants are encouraged to*
7 *respond to the civics question using the answers*
8 *provided below on the sample test.*

9 How does this approach promote
10 understanding, critical thinking, thoughtful
11 analysis or active, engaged citizenship?

12 The naturalization test, while a good
13 test for the purpose for which it is designed and
14 used, is not appropriate for use as a high-stakes
15 high school graduation test. It has several
16 limitations. It does not test advanced
17 understanding well. The use will lead to teachers
18 sacrificing curriculum due to the need to have
19 students memorize answers in order to pass the test.
20 The use will drive the curriculum toward instruction
21 of just basic facts. It is not correlated with
22 improvement of civic behaviors.

23 In addition to these limitations, HB 1858
24 makes no provision for schools to make adaptations,
25 develop alternatives or provide exceptions to

1 students with severe intellectual, physical or
2 multiple disabilities. Thus, schools will have no
3 flexibility, regardless of the stated educational
4 objectives outlined in the students' Individualized
5 Education Plan, to award the student a diploma
6 should they not be able to pass the naturalization
7 test.

8 PASA supports policies, programs and
9 initiatives that will advance the most effective and
10 comprehensive approaches to ensuring that all
11 students receive the civic knowledge and skills
12 necessary for informed and engaged citizenship. The
13 Naturalization test is narrowly focused and does not
14 embody or promote civic learning that
15 develops the knowledge, skills and dispositions
16 necessary for active, engaged citizenship.

17 PASA suggests that the State provide
18 support and resources to help districts and schools
19 develop and use more authentic assessment
20 instruments that measure students' civic skills and
21 dispositional growth. These models include
22 instruments such as: portfolios, classroom-based
23 assessments, and performance assessments.

24 Pennsylvania schools have a long, rich
25 tradition of providing comprehensive instruction in

1 U.S. history, Pennsylvania history, and civics and
2 government. Pennsylvania public schools, working in
3 partnership with historic sites, museums and civic
4 education organizations, provide outstanding
5 preparation for students to be engaged, active
6 citizens.

7 If this election season teaches us
8 nothing else, let it teach us that it is far more
9 important to practice our civic virtues, not just
10 memorize information about them. I'll be pleased to
11 respond to any questions that you have.

12 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SAYLOR: If I could ask
13 the panels that are remaining, the Committee is due
14 to adjourn at 11:30. I want to make sure that we
15 have time for questions.

16 Members do have some other meetings they
17 need to get to, so I apologize. We scheduled this
18 for two hours, and it seems like we are going a
19 little long, but members do have some other
20 meetings. So if you could summarize as best you
21 can, I apologize.

22 MR. CALLAHAN: I will try my best, Mr.
23 Chairman. And I'm going to skip all the, kind of,
24 intros. I'll also tell you that I didn't know who
25 Snooki was, I guess, from the video or whoever that

1 was, but I will continue.

2 My name is John Callahan, and I serve the
3 Pennsylvania School Boards Association as its
4 Assistant Executive Director. I want to thank both
5 chairmen and the Committees for hearing me today.

6 While the goal of increasing students'
7 understanding of government is worthy, PSBA believes
8 HB 1858 creates a redundant and unnecessary mandate.
9 State regulations under Title 22, Chapter 4, require
10 public schools to provide instruction in civics and
11 government at the elementary, middle and high school
12 levels.

13 Further, Pennsylvania has academic
14 standards for civics and government that
15 specifically describe what students should know and
16 be able to do, with a sequence for students in
17 grades 3, 6, 9 and 12.

18 HB 1858 really establishes a new
19 graduation requirement at the very time the General
20 Assembly, under Act 1 of 2016, has suspended the
21 mandate for students to pass the series of
22 high-stakes Keystone Exams in order to graduate.
23 The Department of Education recently recommended to
24 the General Assembly, or actually gave its
25 recommendation to the General Assembly, for

1 replacing these tests. So we should probably take
2 that in light of what we're doing right now.

3 PSBA has consistently and will continue
4 to be opposed to high-stakes tests. It is
5 inappropriate to base high school graduation
6 decisions on the results of a state test rather than
7 a comprehensive long-term academic record.

8 I continue to kind of quote Socrates in
9 truth, I guess you could say. If you're going to
10 keep one truth, and that would be for us high-stakes
11 tests do not work, you have to apply it to
12 everything. So we certainly did support Act 1 of
13 2016 and this Socrates in truth, I guess you could
14 say, also applies to this one. We also oppose the
15 high-stakes test that's in this mandate, and it goes
16 for the same reasons. There is no evidence that
17 high-stake tests accomplish the majority of policy
18 goals they were developed to support.

19 And I go through test-based decisions:
20 do not prepare students for college success;
21 high-stakes tests reinforce inequity in our system;
22 high-stakes tests increase dropout rates;
23 high-stakes testing is not associated with workforce
24 success. It all comes back -- I'll go to the last
25 point, financial impact of testing. This is

1 something that we've been looking at for quite a
2 bit.

3 We know that right now we're spending
4 about \$70 million over a six-year period to develop
5 the Keystone Exams. We've also spent probably over
6 \$1.1 billion over the total expense for exams right
7 now in the State. So this is another cost for
8 school districts.

9 Also, we have the internal costs for
10 monitoring and keeping up the exams and kind of
11 doing all the work that you have to do to fund these
12 things. So that's around \$300 million for that side
13 of the factor. So we also want to consider, you
14 know, when you're looking at it, even though the
15 language may be simple, it's going to require a
16 structure within the schools to keep that going, a
17 structure within the Department of Ed, I imagine, to
18 actually implement this thing.

19 So the language is -- yes, it's only a
20 paragraph, but it really comes down to all of those
21 iterations of how you're going to implement the
22 thing.

23 Lastly, I have -- part of my attachment
24 is, just for your knowledge, the academic standards
25 for civics and government. You've received that.

1 It kind of goes through all of the iterations of
2 what you need to do for each grade. And I'll point
3 out that in one of them, you do have to know who the
4 leaders are of the Federal government. That's
5 actually a requirement. The other thing that's in
6 here that the civic test doesn't get to is the
7 Pennsylvania government, too. So you have to know
8 your Pennsylvania government, which, you know, I'm
9 all for personally, as well.

10 So I mean, that really is the synopsis,
11 Mr. Chairman, as I followed your guidance here in
12 trying to be as short and sweet as possible.

13 When we're coming down to standardized
14 tests and attaching them to graduation requirements,
15 that's where we run into lots of issues. We
16 certainly do believe that people need to know, not
17 only the national side of this, but also the State
18 side, and be educated on that. And that's what you
19 see inside these standards. There's a cost behind
20 what we do, of course, in all things in education.
21 I'd like to say government should be simple, but it
22 never is when you put these things down, sadly.
23 It's certainly become more complicated than a
24 paragraph at this stage.

25 In closing, I'd like to thank you again

1 for letting us do this and really try to provide as
2 much education on what we do and what we have right
3 now to you. So we're always open to questions.

4 DR. HEALEY: Good morning.

5 Thank you, first of all, to the Chairs
6 and both Committees for the opportunity to discuss
7 HB 1858. My name is Dr. Paul Healey. I'm the
8 Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Principals
9 Association and a former superintendent and a proud
10 elementary teacher, as well. And I will keep my
11 remarks to just a few minutes, respecting the time.

12 The Pennsylvania Principals Association
13 wholeheartedly supports the notion that students
14 have an understanding of basic government and being
15 engaged citizens. Our schools continue to provide
16 instruction through relevant and meaningful courses
17 throughout the K-12 years.

18 In fact, Chapter Four outlines the
19 academic standards for civics and government and
20 specifically describes what students should know and
21 be able to do in four areas: principles and
22 documents of government; rights and responsibilities
23 of citizenship; how government works; and how
24 international relationships function.

25 These four areas are further expanded by

1 outlining what students should master by the end of
2 grades 3, 6, 9 and 12. HB 1858 proposes to require
3 all high school students to take and pass a civics
4 test as a prerequisite to receiving a high school
5 diploma or a GED. The Principals Association joins
6 the other educational organizations in opposing HB
7 1858 for the following reasons.

8 First, to suggest that taking one civics
9 test makes a person knowledgeable about government
10 and a productive and engaged citizen is severely
11 flawed. Our students receive instruction starting
12 in their elementary years and the concepts are built
13 upon throughout their school career.

14 Therefore, instead of just one test,
15 students demonstrate that they know and understand
16 the concepts in these areas on an ongoing basis
17 through classroom discussions, projects, course
18 quizzes and tests, course grades, and school and
19 community activities. We already have many hours of
20 lost instructional time due to testing, so to add
21 another required test is counterproductive. In
22 fact, under the new ESSA law, States have been given
23 the flexibility to take a hard look at their
24 assessments and to make some changes. PDE is
25 currently looking at the assessment system and

1 stakeholders have expressed a desire to change the
2 amount of testing currently being conducted in our
3 schools.

4 Our PA standards have been implemented to
5 require more rigor in our curriculum and for our
6 students to engage in deep thinking and higher order
7 skills. The 100 multiple choice civics test
8 requires rote memorization of facts and does not
9 represent an individual's true understanding of any
10 of the concepts being measured, but merely measures
11 the individual's ability to remember and regurgitate
12 facts that are now easily accessible on any handheld
13 device.

14 Therefore, the proposed test serves no
15 legitimate purpose as our courses are far richer in
16 both depth and breadth in the areas of civics and
17 government. You could actually pass the proposed
18 test by just randomly clicking the multiple choice
19 answers.

20 Do we really mean to suggest that we are
21 not going to let a student graduate unless they pass
22 a civics test?

23 What about the student who is not good at
24 taking tests?

25 What about the student that has test

1 anxiety?

2 What about the readability level of the
3 test and the student?

4 What about the student or students who
5 intentionally see the test as a waste of time and
6 intentionally blow it off?

7 We have been down that road before with
8 the eleventh grade PSSA.

9 Why do we need a test when a student
10 already has other ways to show mastery of the
11 concepts throughout their school career?

12 And why do we think that just passing a
13 civics test makes a person a productive citizen?

14 If we are really serious about making
15 sure individuals are productive citizens, then we
16 should be examining not a score on a test, but
17 rather looking at other indicators such as voting
18 demographics, volunteerism, community service
19 projects, mission trips, et cetera. Instead of
20 penalizing our students with another test, we should
21 be applauding our young people who are doing great
22 things on behalf of their communities through
23 helping senior citizens, collecting and distributing
24 food and clothing for the needy, building homes for
25 those in need, and for responding to other calls to

1 action, both in our own country and abroad.

2 Let us not have a knee-jerk reaction to a
3 problem that does not exist in Pennsylvania.

4 Instead, let us continue to examine the issue and
5 have a comprehensive approach to civics and
6 government. Let us not be influenced by a group
7 that does not understand our curriculum or our
8 citizens. And let us not impose another mandate on
9 our schools that is truly not warranted.

10 Thank you for your time, and please do
11 not let HB 1858 go forward.

12 Thank you.

13 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SAYLOR: Thank you,
14 panel.

15 Our first comments or questions are from
16 Chairman Sainato.

17 MINORITY CHAIRMAN SAINATO: Thank you,
18 Chairman.

19 I think all of your testimony was very
20 enlightening. One thing I'm getting is, you're
21 telling us how much we're putting in Pennsylvania
22 and how this is already there, and this is great
23 stuff. I think that sort of gives you the argument
24 why we should have this test because if everything
25 is happening the way you are all saying it, it

1 shouldn't be a problem with these kids passing these
2 tests.

3 MS. WENTZEL: I don't believe it's an
4 underlying concern about children being able to pass
5 the test. In fact, randomly, the Tuesday after
6 Labor Day, I asked my social studies high school
7 department chair to administer it in our eleventh
8 grade U.S. history classes. And by and large, our
9 students would perform on the test. I don't have
10 any doubt on our ability to get students to pass the
11 test.

12 In reality, part of this is assuming
13 these questions aren't already being asked. These
14 questions are being asked. I think in any one of
15 our school districts, we could easily go back and
16 say, *find these questions on a test*, and we would
17 find them.

18 So you know, I think the evidence is very
19 strong in my district and in districts across the
20 State that these questions that are asked on this
21 specific test are already being asked. By being
22 redundant and creating a mandate from the State
23 level, the unintended consequences, both financial
24 and the other repercussions as we've seen.

25 I've testified in front of the Education

1 Committee before about Keystone Exams. Those things
2 then tend to come out, so you know, I'm not
3 concerned about being able to get our students to
4 pass it. I do believe, if it's a mandate, a test is
5 not the way to get there.

6 MINORITY CHAIRMAN SAINATO: I understand
7 what you're saying, Superintendent. I understand
8 what all four of you are saying, but number one, I'm
9 not that big on keystones. We didn't do it. The
10 legislature did not do this. Okay.

11 MS. WENTZEL: Right. Right.

12 MINORITY CHAIRMAN SAINATO: This was not
13 at the executive office. It's always been that
14 stuff. If it was up to me, we'd eliminate it, let
15 the teachers teach and do what they're supposed to
16 do. Okay.

17 And I'm not big on a lot of these tests,
18 including the SATs and all that because a lot of
19 kids have succeeded in college and scored 800 on
20 SATs. So I do sympathize with exactly what you're
21 saying, but I am -- and I have a degree in
22 education, social studies, as well -- and that's why
23 this seems to be important to me.

24 It disturbed me when I saw that video of
25 when these college kids, the bright ones, have no

1 clue of what's going on in the country. You know, I
2 think I'd rather get rid of the Keystone Exam and
3 put this civics exam in. And I'll go one step
4 further, we need a financial literacy exam next, and
5 let you guys in school teach about financial
6 literacy because we have a real serious issue with
7 that. People can't balance a checkbook and have no
8 -- that's just another subject.

9 But I'm just saying I do sympathize with
10 what you're saying. But according to the bill, you
11 know, you have 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 to do it, and
12 I would hope every student in Pennsylvania can.

13 And I think our schools are doing a good
14 job. Like I said, I go in and visit every school in
15 my district. I talk to the kids in grades 4, 8 and
16 12, or 5, 9 and 12, depending on the school
17 district, just to try to get them interested. And
18 my social studies teachers could. They're trying,
19 but then they're getting saddled down with the PSSAs
20 and this test and that test. So I do know where
21 you're coming from with the tests. I just think
22 this type of test is a lot more straightforward and
23 simple than some of the other stuff that is mandated
24 on the schools.

25 So mandates, I'm not big on that either.

1 I do appreciate all of your testimony.

2 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SAYLOR: Representative
3 Barbin.

4 REPRESENTATIVE BARBIN: (Inaudible
5 microphone - malfunction)

6 MS. WENTZEL: Eighth grade happens to be
7 the most tested subject in the State of Pennsylvania
8 right now, with not only some eighth --

9 REPRESENTATIVE BARBIN: (Inaudible
10 microphone - malfunction)

11 MS. WENTZEL: I would say no.

12 REPRESENTATIVE BARBIN: Anyone else?

13 MR. OLEKSIAK: I would say no, as well,
14 if there's high-stakes nature attached to it.

15 We do this. We do this anyway, and we do
16 it very well.

17 REPRESENTATIVE BARBIN: (Inaudible
18 microphone - malfunction)

19 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SAYLOR: Representative
20 Boback.

21 REPRESENTATIVE BOBACK: Thank you, Mr.
22 Chairman.

23 Thank you all for being here, and I truly
24 respect your input. Thank you for it. Thank you
25 for your time.

1 To Dr. Spataro, when you get back to Jay
2 Leno, please give him credit because that's what
3 prompted me to introduce this legislation, the
4 embarrassment on the streets where he was
5 investigating who is the president, who is the vice
6 president. So please give him my regards.

7 I do agree with all of you when you said
8 it's a high-stakes test. In fact, I believe it's
9 the highest-stakes test we can take as citizens of
10 this country. We live the test. We're products of
11 the test, and that is how I see it.

12 I taught, prior to coming here, 33 years,
13 kindergarten through elementary school through
14 middle school, but I was also adjunct professor
15 grad/undergrad and I did teach social studies in the
16 education department. So I'm fully aware of the
17 standards, and that's where I see how this test fits
18 so comfortably into what we're expecting through the
19 State standards.

20 But to me, it's even more important, once
21 again, we have a flag. How many stars on a flag? I
22 think any student in elementary, probably from third
23 grade, can tell you 50 and tell you why.

24 How many stripes? They can tell you why.
25 Two questions off the test.

1 what is our National Anthem? What does
2 it stand for? Another question off the test.

3 In fact, in second grade, *My Country Tis*
4 *Of Thee -- what's my country? What do I mean by my*
5 *country?*

6 America. USA. Correct; our country.

7 *Sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing;*
8 *land where my fathers died.*

9 Who are my fathers? What fathers died?
10 Who are we talking about regarding America?

11 Veterans, soldiers, pilgrims, presidents.
12 You're all correct. Anybody who died in our country
13 representing what we stand for; land where our
14 fathers died.

15 *From every mountainside let freedom ring.*

16 What is freedom? I can go to church. I
17 can go on the playground. I can eat in the cafe --
18 absolutely.

19 So I just adapted three questions on a
20 second grade. I probably could take it to first
21 grade. They're there. We know the answers,
22 basically. Where it gets a little more intricate
23 would be *if the vice president of the United States*
24 *took over the presidency, as they mentioned before,*
25 *and something happened to him, who would take over*

1 *for him?*

2 The Speaker of the House. Now, these are
3 things that we need to know as citizens of the
4 United States.

5 Getting back to the flag. I cannot help
6 but believe that if we promoted -- we have the
7 discussion going now -- something like this to
8 mandate it, again, high-stake, probably the
9 highest-stake -- that they know at least 60 percent,
10 not 100 percent; 60 percent of this test to
11 graduate, starting in kindergarten and taking it to
12 twelfth grade.

13 Do pre-tests on the internet. Do it
14 during study hall. It's all there for you,
15 including the answers, and now I hear we're going to
16 have a study guide. So again, it's respect for the
17 country, and I want to thank our veterans for your
18 support of this bill. Thank you for what you stand
19 for in promoting our flag and country. I do
20 appreciate it.

21 Thank you, Chairmen.

22 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SAYLOR: Representative
23 English.

24 REPRESENTATIVE ENGLISH: Thank you, Mr.
25 Chair.

1 I appreciate the roles and
2 responsibilities each of you have to your
3 memberships, you know, whether it's principals,
4 school board members or administrators or teachers,
5 but I really think this body is sending a message.
6 And I was -- as everybody here was -- quite
7 disturbed by the video.

8 But like Representative Barbin, I'm
9 equally, equally, disturbed by the across-the-board
10 pushback and opposition by the teachers and the
11 school board and the administrators and the
12 principals to something as basic and as, I think,
13 necessary.

14 One question, if this were imposed, along
15 with the other three mandatory Keystones, where
16 would this rank as far as importance: one, two,
17 three, or four? One being the most important; four
18 being the least important.

19 Where would you rate this exam in
20 conjunction with the other three, which are
21 literacy, biology and algebra I, as important for
22 our students to graduate?

23 MR. OLEKSIAK: I don't -- I couldn't
24 begin to answer that question. If it is put out as
25 a mandate, a high-stakes test -- and high-stakes

1 doesn't mean important. High-stakes means need to
2 pass to graduate; it has a very specific meaning.

3 They're all equally important. I don't
4 think you can divvy it up in any fashion. And I
5 would like to reiterate that I didn't hear anyone at
6 this table say that we don't need more civics
7 education and a focus on that. As an educator, I
8 could have predicted when -- and I did talk to
9 administrators in my school district about this --
10 when No Child Left Behind was passed in 2002 and
11 social studies was, for lack of a better word, left
12 out, there was no doubt what was going to happen to
13 civics education, none. And the response is not to
14 add it as a test. The response is to do what this
15 body and the Senate did unanimously, to say, *whoa,*
16 *let's look at what we're doing here.*

17 When No Child Left Behind was passed with
18 all of the testing requirements, teachers were very
19 concerned. We're going to lose field trips. We're
20 going to lose, you know, current events time, as we
21 heard. They all went away. They didn't go away
22 because teachers aren't patriotic or because
23 teachers don't care about their kids or about civics
24 education. They went away because of the
25 high-stakes nature of the testing that we faced.

1 We have an opportunity now to change
2 that. Your colleagues in both chambers have said,
3 *we need to do that.* No one at this table is opposed
4 to civics education. I taught it. I cherish it. I
5 value it. I passed it on to my own children. But
6 to equate it to the mess that we're in from testing
7 is a big mistake.

8 REPRESENTATIVE ENGLISH: I appreciate
9 that, but I think it is a chance and an opportunity
10 with our Every Student Succeeds Act here in
11 Pennsylvania to incorporate what we already have,
12 which is good. But I think we're just looking for,
13 you know, a basic level so we're not embarrassed by
14 what we see on Jay Leno programs and things, and
15 everybody walks out of here and just circles up your
16 knowledge and understanding. And we want them to
17 perpetually do that, not just through high school,
18 but beyond.

19 MR. OLEKSIAK: If I could, Representative
20 English, I agree. That is embarrassing.

21 I would encourage those of you who were
22 upset by that video to go -- every May, there is the
23 Pennsylvania Academic Competition held in your
24 chamber. Go watch that. The programs that we heard
25 about that so many of -- that some of you and others

1 have done -- they're here in Pennsylvania. They're
2 our students.

3 So I think to paint the students of
4 Pennsylvania, and by extension their teachers, with
5 that video does a huge disservice to the educators
6 and students of Pennsylvania.

7 REPRESENTATIVE ENGLISH: No, we're not
8 doing that, but I would absolutely challenge every
9 school board administrator and every teacher with a
10 moment or an opportunity in time to administer that
11 exam and just to see as a baseline and report it
12 back in faculty discussion and have an idea, so that
13 there is interaction to say, you know, *maybe we do a*
14 *great job of doing it, but our kids just don't know*
15 *it.* I think we need to make it important to them,
16 and it's only important to them when those that are
17 near and dear, the teachers, show that it's
18 important to them.

19 MR. OLEKSIAK: I would agree, but I would
20 come back to what we are here testifying about. We
21 are testifying about a very specific bill with very
22 specific consequences. And if your suggestion is
23 that what should happen is that kind of testing of
24 the students by the district to see where they are,
25 nobody here is going to say that's wrong.

1 We should be doing that.

2 REPRESENTATIVE ENGLISH: Would you trade
3 this one for the other three, the Keystones?

4 MR. OLEKSIAK: I'm not going down that
5 road.

6 REPRESENTATIVE ENGLISH: Thank you. I
7 appreciate it.

8 MR. OLEKSIAK: Thank you.

9 REPRESENTATIVE McCARTER: I'll answer
10 that last question. I was a social studies teacher,
11 too, for 35 years before I came to the House up
12 here. And I must admit this is a fascinating
13 discussion. And I think, as many people have
14 testified in all three panels, you know, I don't
15 think there's a person in this room that doesn't
16 want to have our students be knowledgeable, be, you
17 know, engaged in civic discussion and civic action
18 in every way, shape and form. I think that's a
19 given, you know, for all of us.

20 I think what it comes down to in many
21 cases, though, you know, it's interesting. I think
22 if you had gone out on the street probably in 1958
23 thereabouts and asked students about the nature of
24 their government at that particular time, they would
25 have had the same difficulty in answering the

1 questions that the students did today.

2 And they would have known who Daniel
3 Boone was because Daniel Boone was on television.
4 Or they would have known about the first Sputnik
5 because they heard it every night on television in
6 terms of what happens.

7 Our students today, like all of us, are
8 inundated with more information, more knowledge than
9 ever before in human history. In fact, we're
10 inundated to the point that many of us know nothing
11 because it doesn't have the priority aspects of
12 this.

13 For many of us in here today, this is a
14 priority aspect, that they should know civic
15 knowledge, and I agree with that, but we ask our
16 public schools to do so much, we ask the teachers of
17 Pennsylvania to do so much in terms of what happens.
18 In comparison over here, where you're inundated
19 against every computer game, everything that happens
20 on the Internet, everything that happens on
21 television, everything that's out there in terms of
22 the sports world. It's a tremendous challenge as to
23 what's happening.

24 So one of the things that comes out of my
25 mind in listening to testimony today is something

1 I've thought about quite a lot. It is that really
2 we have an education system in general that has been
3 created on an agricultural schedule. It doesn't
4 take into summers, part of the summer anyway, and it
5 ends at grade 12.

6 Why does it end at grade 12 in our public
7 schools?

8 If we want a civics program that really
9 works, or we want additional learning in terms of
10 the sciences and so on, maybe we need to start
11 thinking about the question of time and how much
12 time we give to a lot of these subjects to be able
13 to carry out the enumerable mandates that we give in
14 terms of from up here in the House and on the hill,
15 to be able to get students ready, to be able to
16 participate in a world that they are going to live
17 in for a lot longer than we have, and a lot longer
18 in terms of what they're going to be expected to do.
19 And one of those things is civic engagement.

20 And I heard it in testimony today, and I
21 was glad to hear it, having also been very active in
22 terms of community programs for students and service
23 learning, that our students are out there in the
24 community, and they're out there doing wonderful
25 things, and they're engaged. Not all of them know

1 everything about American government. And not one
2 test of 100 questions or 200 questions or 300
3 questions will ever make them great citizens. What
4 makes a great citizen is being part of your civic --
5 part of your existence within your community and
6 what takes place.

7 So I think we all have to sit back a
8 little bit and think about this bill and how best we
9 can make this occur because we all agree we want it
10 to occur, but it's a means by which to do that and
11 we don't want to hurt people along the way.

12 Thank you.

13 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SAYLOR: Representative
14 Kortz.

15 REPRESENTATIVE KORTZ: Thank you, Mr.
16 Chairman.

17 Thank you all for your testimony today.
18 I'd be remiss if I didn't say I was a little bit
19 disappointed in your vehement opposition to this
20 bill. Obviously -- and Representative English did
21 steal my one question about trading off tests, but
22 anyway, some people do like this.

23 You probably heard me speak earlier
24 today. Ms. Kerri Yablonsky, who is a social studies
25 teacher in South Allegheny High School, does use the

1 test as a diagnostic tool. She likes it. She
2 thinks it's very helpful. Some of you think it's a
3 waste of time. I wholeheartedly disagree.

4 But coming back to that, as I stated
5 earlier, we are very flexible with this bill, and
6 we're willing to tweak it. Representative Boback
7 and I are willing to do what we can to get this
8 through, but we feel very strongly that people
9 should know who the President of the United States
10 is, who George Washington was, how many States are
11 in this nation.

12 I believe in my heart that we have a 20
13 percent voting turnout because people don't care
14 because they don't know. They don't know the rules
15 of the game. They're not getting it. You may be
16 teaching some of this in high school -- and there
17 are a lot of great teachers; don't get me wrong.
18 I'm not knocking the teaching profession. I think
19 you guys do a great job, but some students aren't
20 grasping it. They don't know the rules. They don't
21 show up to vote. It's unbelievable how many people
22 I ask, *did you vote? No, I'm not even registered.*

23 They don't even know who the President of
24 the United States is. That's appalling. That's
25 appalling, and we've got to start somewhere. We've

1 got to start with our students.

2 So thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate
3 the hearing today. Thank you all.

4 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SAYLOR: Chairman
5 Roebuck.

6 MINORITY CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Thank you,
7 Mr. Chairman.

8 As I listen to this last discussion, I
9 guess I am sitting here very disturbed, in part,
10 because it seems to me you can teach people facts,
11 but if you don't know what the facts mean, then
12 you're in trouble.

13 What we're about is teaching the
14 principles of a democratic society. One of those
15 principles is that you disagree on things. That
16 doesn't make it somehow negative because you say you
17 disagree. I'm appalled that one of my colleagues
18 seems to suggest that something is wrong because you
19 disagree. That's what we're talking about. That's
20 democracy.

21 It concerns me because oftentimes when we
22 teach things, we include some things in, we exclude
23 other things. And those are the principles that are
24 important. When we talk about what side of the
25 Civil War, and we don't teach what the Civil War was

1 about, then we're in trouble. And I don't know that
2 giving a test is going to make that any more a
3 central fact or reality.

4 I go back to where I started from today
5 because indeed it is far more embarrassing to me
6 that you have individuals, some of whom have college
7 degrees, some of whom have lawyer's degrees, running
8 for the presidency of the United States and not
9 knowing American history. That's not a college
10 student. That's not a high school student, an
11 elementary student. It's someone who's in our
12 government who doesn't know that.

13 So we've got a lot to do. Doing this
14 test is not going to address that. It's not going
15 to make it any better. I'm not even certain that
16 this test is going to do what we think it's going to
17 do. But I do think that in terms of all of the
18 things that make democracy work and important, there
19 is a lot more we have to put into what we teach and
20 how we teach it to get to that goal.

21 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

22 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN SAYLOR: Thank you.

23 I'm going to turn this back over to
24 Chairman Barrar for closing comments.

25 My only comment is I appreciate the

1 panels' comments. I did want to remind Jerry that I
2 led the opposition to Keystone Exams many years ago.
3 I'm not sure where the Chairman is right now on that
4 issue, but we're taking a very close look at it.

5 Again, I think one of the things that I
6 learned, and how I learned about civics, was my POD
7 teacher -- and we don't teach POD anymore -- made
8 every one of us in my senior class, when we took
9 POD, get involved. We had to go to borough council
10 meetings, townships. That was a requirement.

11 If you wanted to get a C, you didn't have
12 to do anything. But if you wanted an A, you were
13 going to have to participate. Maybe those are some
14 of the things that our school districts need to
15 start looking at is how students do appreciate what
16 elected officials are.

17 I remind people in my town hall meetings
18 every time, and I just had one on Friday. The
19 biggest problem is so many people will show up to
20 vote this year for President of the United States.
21 We'll have 80 percent of the people show up to vote
22 this year. But next year when school boards,
23 township supervisors are up, who affect the
24 pocketbooks of every taxpayer more than I or
25 Chairman Barrar may, 15 percent show up to vote. So

1 it is something, I think, that we need to do a
2 better job of definitely teaching our students and
3 our adults, by the way, how important participation
4 is in our civic community.

5 You know, so many times -- you know, I
6 was a past JC in Red Lion. So many times, I
7 remember people wanting to see the fireworks but
8 nobody wanted to help raise the money to put the
9 fireworks display on. You know, if you want to
10 shape your community, you've got to participate. My
11 suggestion will always be, and excuse the language,
12 but if you want to bitch, you better be involved.

13 Thank you.

14 Chairman Barrar.

15 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN BARRAR: You really
16 took -- your comments were great in closing.

17 I just want to thank all of the panelists
18 that were here today and testified before the
19 Committee. And I will just add that I was
20 disappointed with your testimony. I was hoping to
21 see a little bit more support for the legislation.
22 But with that, I will allow the other chairmen to
23 make a comment if they choose.

24 Thank you for being here, all of you.

25 (Whereupon, the hearing concluded at 11:52 a.m.)

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

C E R T I F I C A T E

I do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and accurate transcript, to the best of my ability, of a public hearing taken from a videotape recording.

Tiffany L. Mast, Reporter
Notary Public

Tiffany L. Mast • Mast Reporting
mastreporting@mail.com
(717) 348-1275