

By Gary Porter, National Director, Constitution Leadership Initiative, Inc.

Although they were sent to Philadelphia merely to “fix” the defective Articles of Confederation, the 55 delegates instead took the long view and designed a whole new government from the ground up. On June 29, 1787, Declaration of independence signer and Articles of Confederation drafter John Dickenson admonished the delegates that *“We are not forming plans for a Day Month Year or Age, but for Eternity.”* But would the new plan even work, let alone last for “eternity?” No one knew or could know for certain. They weren’t even sure the new Constitution would be ratified by nine states. Yet they felt confident enough in their product that they were willing to accept without debate the preamble drafted by Committee of Style Chairman Gouverneur Morris. Among other things, their new Constitution would *“secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.”* Yet most delegates must have realized their new government would not last long without the vigorous support of its citizens, thus Dr. Franklin’s warning about “keeping” the republic.

So how do we “keep” the republic alive and well? One way is by ensuring we voting adults understand the Constitution and how it was intended to operate. During his 1832-33 visit to America French Judge Alexis De Tocqueville observed that *“... every citizen is taught...the history of his country, and the leading features of its Constitution. ... it is extremely rare to find a man imperfectly acquainted with all these things, and a person wholly ignorant of them is sort of a phenomenon..”* Could he make the same statement today? I think not. Judging from candid “man on the street” –type interviews, videos of which abound on YouTube, finding people “wholly ignorant” of the Constitution is now the norm; to find someone familiar with the “leading features” of the Constitution is now the “phenomenon.”

That’s why I formed the Constitution Leadership Initiative, Inc. and why CLI sponsors Constitution Classes wherever and whenever it can. Our national ignorance and apathy over the Constitution must be reversed.

Last week I was privileged to help Yorktown Boys and Girls Club Director Joe Loos take five young Yorktown Boys and Girls Club members, four of which had just completed my nine weekly lessons on the Constitution, to Washington, D.C. to view the Constitution and meet with their Congressman. It was a grand time (except for the frequent accident delays coming home – Note to self: don’t do this again on a Friday, even if it is Flag Day!). Seeing the original Declaration of Independence, Constitution and Bill of Rights at the National Archives was an awesome experience. Afterwards we enjoyed a picnic lunch near the Lincoln Memorial and, after saying hi to Mr. Lincoln, headed to the Rayburn Office Building for our meeting with Congressman Rob Wittman. Wittman, now in his third term representing the 750,000 citizens of the 1st VA District, was a gracious host and answered the young patriots many questions about what his job entails and how he balances his responsibilities in Washington with those of his family. Most of all, the kids got to see that their Congressman is accessible, approachable, and eager to hear from them.

Yes, at some point these middle-schoolers will be taught about their government, and hopefully be able to, as the Virginia SOLs require: *“demonstrate knowledge of the federal system described in the*

Constitution of the United States.” But the SOLs demand much and leave little time for schools to cover everything in sufficient depth, thus the importance, I feel, for CLI’s extra-curricular Constitution classes. Do you have a group, young or old, who would like to study the Constitution? Contact me at constitutionlead@gmail.com.

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