

Learning about Legislation #3: Happy Constitution Day!

By Kierstyn Zolko - Lower Bucks Indivisible

Today (September 17th) 230 years ago the Constitution of the United States was signed in Philadelphia. Back in 1987, to celebrate the bicentennial of the signing of the Constitution, a program was created where freshmen in high school could participate in a Constitutional competition. Teams of students would be faced with both factual and philosophical questions, and would compete in essay-writing challenges and debates. I still have my workbook from this event, and I thought I would share some content about participatory government.

“All American citizens, with very few exceptions, possess the right to participate in the political life of the country. Voting for candidates and running for public office are two examples which are most obvious. But are there other ways of participating? What about working on the campaign of a candidate you think should be elected? If you contribute money to a candidate you are certainly participating. Writing letters to public officials, reading newspapers, talking about public issues with your friends, and going to meetings where political questions are discussed, are all ways in which the citizens participate in the political life of their country...

“But how much time should we spend participating? If it seems that everything is going as we think it should, we will probably decide that we don’t have to spend too much time checking up on the people we hire to do things for us, although we would probably be foolish to ignore them completely. And so it is with the government and the people who work there: the president, senators, representative, and judges, as well as the many civil servants who are part of the bureaucracy of the government. As long as we are more or less satisfied with way they are doing their job, we probably will not wish to spend too much time checking up on them, although we will want to keep an eye on them...

“...If we have reason to suppose that instead of protecting our rights it is violating them, we are only doing the sensible thing to keep a closer eye on our government. If we believe that the government is not providing the security we think it is supposed to provide, we will want to find out why and find ways to improve the situation. This may involve hiring different people to work in the government. For example, we may elect different people to represent us and make the laws on our behalf. If the matter is very important and we are seriously dissatisfied with the performance of those who are working for us in the government, we may want to do more than simply vote. We may want to donate money to a political campaign, or work for a candidate who will do a better job.”

-“We, the People,” Center for Civic Education, 1987, pp. 124-125