

Dangerous because the growth of such a distorted notion was first a cause—and later a justification—for the damaging flight of so many from the vital duties of active citizenship.

There are other forces which have degraded our public life and fueled public cynicism about our elected leaders. Perhaps the most potent of these is a stunning popular ignorance about our constitutional system and the defining events in our national history. In a 1996 Washington Post national poll, only 24% of those surveyed could name their United States Senators, just 26% knew the length of a United States Senator's term, and 6% could identify the Chief Justice of the United States.

We have all read the full results of these surveys. They need no further repetition.

But here is the terrible truth. Our founders created a government that will survive as a guardian of liberty only with the active support of citizens who are both engaged and informed. Those honored with the power to govern must be accountable to voters who care about the vitality of our public institutions—and who understand what is required to preserve that vitality.

Last November, 36% of eligible voters participated in congressional elections. In 1996, barely 49% of our fellow citizens voted in the presidential elections. These are signs of sickness—not of health—these are clear warning signs that the foundation upon which our representative government depends is weakening and growing weaker.

A public culture crippled by apathy and infected by ignorance spawns other enemies of freedom. As more and more reject the idea of active citizenship, many who remain engaged embrace intensely focused but narrow views. These activists are passionate about a single issue and indifferent to all others. They are one-cause citizens, and they see the complexities of our time through the distorting prism of a glass that makes balance impossible and context irrelevant. Name the subject—you will find a "one-cause caucus" eager to impose what are inevitably minority views upon an indifferent—and thus unrepresented—majority.

We have—to take one example—seen the rise of preacher-politicians or politician-preachers who seem convinced that God is a politician with views just like their own. Does God really have a firm opinion about the right number of rest stops on interstate highways? I hope He doesn't. In the American system, you cannot make a religion of politics and you should not make religion political. But we are in danger of doing both.

Our founders took measured—determined steps to insure that our country would never be *constitutionally* a Christian nation—that we would never be a nation with a state religion of any kind. But they took equally measured—determined steps to guarantee that the private right to worship would be meticulously protected. Understanding that critical constitutional difference demands a thoughtful and engaged electorate. That so many of our fellow citizens manifestly do not understand is yet another of the dangers we confront.

The rising tide of constitutional and historical ignorance is exacerbated by the popular media's increasing abdication of its responsibility. The columnist, Russell Baker, has written about

"Our dependence on entertainments that are almost ritualistic in their repetitious shootings, capers, chases, carnal congresses and witless humor—thought is almost entirely absent from these entertainments.

Their producers clearly assume that there is no audience for thought."

And thought is not the only thing absent. Also nearly invisible is any serious attention to important matters of public policy. The capers—congresses—and chases—are dominant almost to the point of exclusion.

Mine is a somber message. Many—even those who share some of these concerns—will argue that I have missed the larger point—the larger point being that America has never been richer—safer—or more content. We do enjoy unprecedented prosperity. As journalist Greg Easterbrook reminds us, "Even home runs are at an all-time high."

To those who argue that proposition—and I respect them—I reply that you have missed an even larger point. Economic progress, social stability, the true happiness of our people—none can be long sustained if our public life is impoverished by citizen neglect—if our constitutional system is left to the mercy of accidental leaders unaccountable to an informed electorate. Political liberty—economic freedom both depend upon citizens who understand and who care and who are passionate about the discharge of their duties as free men and women. Upon this proposition our founders staked their "lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor." What was true for them—remains true for us.

The citizen leaders who imagined and created our government were not afraid to remind us of its demands. As the delegates to the Constitutional Convention left Independence Hall for the last time, the crowd that met them was anxious and concerned. One in that gathering shouted out above the din, "What have you given us?" To that question, Benjamin Franklin replied,—"a republic—if you can keep it." A republic—if you can keep it.

And throughout our history, our greatest leaders have been those who knew that government's purpose is far more than to preserve public ease—it is also to promote public service. And so these leaders—true leaders—were not afraid to remind us of our public obligation. More than 60 years ago, in the midst of the great depression—in the shadow of the Second World War, Franklin Roosevelt spoke words that still stir—and still shine:

"There is a mysterious cycle in human events. To some generations much is given. Of other generations much is expected. This generation of Americans has a rendezvous with destiny."

To my generation and the one which follows, much has been given. But not much has been expected. We turn now to face our destiny—a destiny I believe that will depend upon whether—we have the will—the intelligence—the civic soul—to place safely into later hands the glorious republic it has been our honor to inherit.

Of our destiny, what would we have history say?

IN HONOR OF POLICE CHIEF  
WILLIAM J. HARRIS

HON. JERRY WELLER

OF ILLINOIS  
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 10, 1999

Mr. WELLER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Police Chief William J. Harris of Manhattan, Illinois as he retires from the Village of Manhattan's police department which he served for over 30 years.

Chief Harris was born on December 15th, 1938 in Joliet, Illinois where he resided until he and his family moved to Manhattan in 1945. Following his high school years, William Harris served our country in the United States Air Force's Security Division from 1956 through 1960. On October 20, 1962 Mr. Harris joined Ms. Mary Jane Buitenwerf in a marriage that has produced three sons; David, Daniel, and Michael. Bill and Mary Jane have lived their entire married life in Manhattan.

While working for the Caterpillar Tractor Company in Joliet, Mr. Harris began his tremendous record of public service while working as a part time Manhattan police officer in 1965. Nearly four years later, Mr. Harris took over the position as acting police chief on June 1, 1969. Only six months later, on January 1, 1970, William Harris was hired as Manhattan's full time police chief where he has served to present day.

In addition to his dedication to keep Manhattan a peaceful community, Mr. Harris was a member of the Manhattan Volunteer Fire Department for several years. He still enjoys active memberships with both the Will County Police Chief Association and the Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police.

Mr. Speaker, I believe it is fitting and appropriate to honor the lifetime of service Mr. Harris has given to his community. Undoubtedly, there are many families in Will County who are thankful each day for the service Bill Harris has done for Manhattan. The Village of Manhattan is a quiet and safe community, and its residents can point to Chief Harris' good work as the reason for this.

I wish Chief Harris, his wife Mary Jane, and their children and grandchildren all the best life can offer in the coming years.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. JOHN N. HOSTETTLER

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 10, 1999

Mr. HOSTETTLER. Mr. Speaker, on rollcall Vote No. 35, I was unavoidably detained in my congressional district due to weather constraints. Had I been present, I would have voted "yea" on this vote to pass H.R. 540.

TRIBUTE TO WTOP RADIO ON ITS  
30TH ANNIVERSARY

HON. J. DENNIS HASTERT

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 10, 1999

Mr. HASTERT. Mr. Speaker, I submit the following statement about WTOP Radio to the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD:

It is with great pleasure that I note that today is the 30th anniversary of WTOP Radio in Washington, D.C. This organization plays a vital part in our city by being a prime source of information on major news events. Over the past 30 years, WTOP has offered extensive, up-to-the-minute coverage of all the important happenings in the nation's capital and around the world.