



## WHAT'S HAPPENING AT NYSRSAS

*Eugene Goldwasser*



### Position Paper

The members of the Executive Board expressed their dismay with the events at the Capitol on January 6, 2021, at our Executive Board Meeting on February 18. We felt we needed to devote an entire session to discussing the actions taken by rioters who invaded the Capitol, and the conduct of 147 representatives and 10 senators who voted to question the results of the election.

The dialogue was continued at a Focus Group on March 18. The Focus Group meeting resulted in the development of a **Position Paper on Civics and Citizenship Education** that appears on pages two and three of this newsletter.

The position paper reinforces the need for civics and citizenship education at all grades from kindergarten through grade 12, and indicates our support as an organization for school districts to commit to this concept. In addition, the position paper will be mailed to education leaders as well as media outlets. We would be interested in your reaction to the events of January 6<sup>th</sup> as well as the position paper. Please communicate with us at [info@nysrsas.org](mailto:info@nysrsas.org)

### NYSRSAS Citizenship Award

Another outcome of the Focus Group is the creation of an NYSRSAS Citizenship Award for high school students who demonstrate outstanding citizenship by their commitment and service to their community. This award includes an NYSRSAS Citizenship Certificate and a monetary award of \$100 or \$150 to be determined. The monetary award will **not** come from members' dues. Instead it will come solely from donations. Executive Board members have committed upwards of \$1000 to this effort. If you would like to contribute, please send a check made out to **NYSRSAS** to

our Treasurer, **Ned Price**, at **31 Walters Avenue, Cold Spring Harbor, NY 11724**. A list of the students selected to receive the NYSRSAS Citizenship Award will appear in the July newsletter.

### Annual Luncheon Meeting

Our Annual Luncheon Meeting will not take place this year because of the pandemic. Our Executive Board will meet on Thursday, June 10, at 10 AM, on Zoom. If any member would like to attend, please send an e-mail to [info@nysrsas.org](mailto:info@nysrsas.org) and you will receive a link a few days prior to the meeting.

### Executive Board Position Available

The position of Secretary on the Executive Board is currently open. If you would like to learn more about the duties of the secretary, want to become more involved with our organization and would be interested in serving as secretary, please send an e-mail to [info@nysrsas.org](mailto:info@nysrsas.org) or call the office at 631-761-5451

We also have an opening for someone who would like to establish a by-line -- someone who would like to write a quarterly column on any topic of interest to our readers and become a regular contributor to our newsletter. Please email your interest in becoming a newsletter contributor to [info@nysrsas.org](mailto:info@nysrsas.org).

*NYSRSAS President, Gene Goldwasser, was a school principal for 24 years. Since retiring, he has been a Hofstra adjunct professor and a coach with the Institute for Student Achievement.*

## Are You Up-to-Date?

If you have not already done so, we urge you to renew your membership. Annual dues are \$25. Checks should be mailed to: Edward Price, Treasurer, 31 Walters Avenue, Cold Spring Harbor, NY 11724

**New York State Retired School Administrators and Supervisors****NYSRSAS****How We Ensure the Future of Our Democracy  
Education is the Answer**

We (NYSRSAS) are an organization of approximately 350 retired school administrators and supervisors concerned with the welfare of our country and how we educate our students to become more responsible citizens. What happened on January 6, 2021, was abhorrent and represented an attack on our democracy.

We have learned that many of the initiators as well as the perpetrators of the January 6<sup>th</sup> invasion of the Capitol were well-educated individuals. We ask ourselves why so many of our fellow citizens are convinced that the 2020 presidential election was “stolen,” especially when there was no credible evidence to support that position. Were they never taught to distinguish between fact and opinion to support their conclusions?

This prompts us to wonder if we need to do a better job of providing students with a clearer understanding of democracy and an appreciation for democratic values. We are aware that Civics, Citizenship and Government are incorporated into Standard #5 of the New York State Social Studies Curriculum. However, it may not be sufficient just to teach about government, civic values, and the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. At every grade level, students need to develop a sincere desire to become active citizens of our democracy. They need to experience situations in which they are required to make decisions related to all aspects of citizenship and government. It is not enough to know about elections. Students need to know how a democracy is enhanced through participation in the voting process and thwarted when voter suppression activities abound. They need to understand and care about how voter suppression impacts different groups within society and the far-reaching effects it has on future generations. We maintain that it is insufficient to limit instruction to areas of civics, citizenship and government structure without equivalent emphasis on decision-making and involvement with real-life experiences. These may include developing guidelines for student government, and creating opportunities for political debates on issues pertinent to students at all grade levels.

*Cont'd on page 3*

We believe that school curricula and student experiences should incorporate the following:

- Continued age appropriate study of the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights, and how they can be modified
- The study of how differences of opinions are constructively expressed and peacefully resolved in a democracy
- A firm understanding of and an appreciation for the multicultural nature of the United States and how democratic principles support a rich, multi-cultural mix
- An awareness of how the negative impact of racism is detrimental to society
- The influence print, broadcast and social media have on opinion formation, and how students must learn how to identify bias, distinguish fact from misinformation and make well-informed decisions
- The importance of voting in a democracy while guarding against voter suppression and protecting the right to vote

We believe that all school personnel as well as the broader school community must be engaged in discussing the following questions:

- What is the role of school leaders in establishing an environment that celebrates the principles of democracy and one that fosters caring for and about each other?
- How can teachers best create a classroom atmosphere based on democratic values? What specific activities teach and enhance good citizenship?
- What can and should schools do to involve parents and community members to promote the study of democratic values?

It is the firm belief of the New York State Retired School Administrators and Supervisors that the events of January 6<sup>th</sup> demonstrated the fragility of our democracy. We call upon all members of the school community to take constructive and appropriate action to create a renewed emphasis on an expanded view of civics and citizenship education to make sure the events of January 6<sup>th</sup> never happen again.

**Contact Us: NYSRSAS – N.Y.S. Retired School Administrators and Supervisors**

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email: [info@nysrsas.org](mailto:info@nysrsas.org)

**FROM THE DESK OF:** *The Reflective Retiree*

**MY COUNTRY, 'TIS OF THEE**

*Corine Lipset-Huberman*

As a person well into my senior years, I find it astonishing that I am first now beginning to understand the meaning of the word *hate*. Yes, I encountered people I came to dislike, I read about events that were despicable, I learned about people who committed violent acts and I knew that there were groups of people who hated other groups of people just because they were who they were. But the hatred that exists in the United States today is different somehow, a hatred that I am not used to, that is unsettling, uncomfortable, un-American and downright frightening.

Perhaps I had become so naïve that I thought much of the hatred that white people held against Afro-Americans had begun to dissipate, that Asian Americans were well-regarded and highly esteemed members of society, that Hispanic Americans were no longer regarded as second-class citizens, that Jews were the target of Nazi Germany but certainly not targeted by fellow Americans. Yes, I know that much of that still exists, but the hatred that now permeates the United States from coast to coast is unfathomable and stems largely from differences in political beliefs.

An attack on our Capitol takes place. Rioters wear symbols of Nazi Germany, they look to capture the Speaker of the House, they seek out the Vice-President and shout their desire to hang him, they bloody and beat upon the Capitol police, killing one man and maiming 140 others. An Asian woman is attacked on the street in New York City while others watch and do nothing. A police officer is murdered in Washington, D.C.. Q'anon members construct theories that are fanatical, antithetical to reality. Many governors pass laws that impose greater support for voter suppression. Even



measures that are recommended as antidotes to the expansion of the coronavirus pandemic become a political football. A mask becomes a political icon. A drink of water given to a person on a voting line is labeled a misdemeanor. Any bill presented by a Democratic congress is vowed to be disabled by Republican opposition, even though a majority of Republican voters are in favor of it. There is a spitefulness and a nastiness that presents itself, more than just a difference of political views.



This is not the America I grew up in. Or is it? The troubles facing America today are a whole host of issues: white supremacy, institutional racism, police reform, poverty, the pandemic, educational equity, tax reform, unemployment, climate change, voting rights, anti-discrimination protection, gun safety, immigration policies, health insurance, infrastructure repair, foreign relations – and these are just some of America’s problems! Most of these issues are not new problems, they have just all emerged as serious problems at the same time. Moreover, they are now recognized by most Americans as problems and they are demanding solutions.

But solutions are not easily come by – especially when the population and its representatives are so divisive, so oppositional, so hateful towards each other. When a couple find themselves in such a bind, they can opt for marriage counseling. What does a government do? Where can a government go? Who can provide the counseling? As the theatrical King of Siam said, “It is a puzzlement!”

My parents came to America about 100 years ago. They loved their adopted country with a fierceness bequeathed to me and I grew up believing that I lived in the best country in the whole world. I still love this country but I am saddened by  
*(continued on page 5)*

**MY COUNTRY, 'TIS OF THEE** *(cont'd from page 4)*

the state that I witness her in today.

I do not pretend to have any answers. I can only state the questions. What will happen to America – the land of the free and the home of the brave? Will our democracy survive this dual pandemic – one affecting our physical health and the other affecting our political health?

It is really up to us, my friends. We must be guided by good common sense, by good values. We must support political candidates who are honest, who are trustworthy, who will stand by their principles, who will work for their country and not for themselves, who will fight for equality among all, equality of races, ethnic groups, sexual orientation and women’s rights. And we must vote – at all levels of government, local, state and national. And not only must we vote but we must help our fellow Americans vote – those who have no transportation, those who need assistance with child care in order to get out to vote, the handi-

capped who need our help to vote. We need to assist voters in those states that have made voting more difficult with new laws designed mainly to keep minority groups away from the polls, we need to send money that is used to hire buses, to provide water and snacks during long rides on those buses, to do whatever is needed so that all people eligible to vote can vote -- for that is how we ensure that we achieve the kind of government that we desire!

Yes, it’s “**My country, ‘tis of thee**” but it’s also



**THY Country,  
'tis of thee!**  
**So fight for your country,  
fight for a  
democratic America!.**

*Dr. Corine Lipset-Huberman has had extensive experience at all levels of education. She spent the last 19 years prior to retirement as principal of the Village Elementary School in Syosset, NY.*

**THOUGHTS ON THE POSITION PAPER**

*Elliott Kigner*

How can it be that so many Americans, particularly those who label themselves patriotic, believe that our last presidential election was “stolen?” This thinking persists despite the fact that evidence does not exist to support their certainty. With some, the position is so strong that they were willing to criminally and violently attack the seat of our national government. It is a puzzle that these protesters did not understand that the election results were already decided.

All of this raises the question of why so many of our fellow citizens are convinced that an occurrence is true even though proof is missing. Were they never taught to be sure of the facts, let alone possess facts, to support their conclusion? Or do they simply accept the positions of leaders who may have a history of spreading misinformation or deliberately lying?

If such a condition exists with much of the American population, it may be that our instructional priorities need to be corrected. Do we

teach history and science merely as bundles of facts and events? To understand, or even recite from memory, pieces of our Constitution might constitute knowledge, but to apply it to citizenship is another matter. In a science experiment, students are supposed to be able to tell if a conclusion is anchored in reliable data or if it is influenced by existing bias. A science teacher must present problems which call for application of critical and scientific thinking.

But sound and systematic thinking should not be limited to scientific or historical events. All classes at all grades could be market places for the exchange of opinions which demand honest, objective and verifiable evidence. Until that condition is reached, and its importance accepted by everyone, we will continue to face the dangers of incompetent and self-serving leaders.



*Elliott Kigner retired from the Smithtown School District. In past years he served as Vice-President of NYSRSAS.*

## HOW HARD SHOULD IT BE TO VOTE?

Stewart Mortman

The House of Representatives has passed H.R.1 (For the People Act). This bill addresses voter access, election integrity and security, campaign finance and ethics. The bill expands voter registration (e.g., automatic and same-day registration) and voting access (e.g., vote-by-mail and early voting). It also puts limits on the removal of voters from voting rolls.

Dozens of states are creating laws designed to make voting more difficult. After losses in the 2020 election, numerous conservative states appear to have made the calculation that the best way to secure future victories is to make it more difficult to vote. These laws (enacted or proposed) are designed, almost exclusively, to disenfranchise minority voters.

One state has eliminated Sunday voting. This is designed to prevent activities such as Souls-to-the-Polls. Souls-to-the-Polls is an organized effort to have parishioners go *en masse* after Sunday service to voting sites to cast their ballots. Some states have reduced the number of voting sites, primarily in minority districts. This has created a situation where voters are required to stand in line for hours

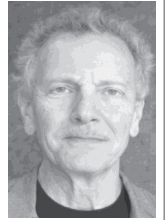


before being able to cast their vote. One new state law makes it a crime to give any of the people on these lines water or food. In numerous states

gerrymandering has made it virtually impossible for minority voters to be fairly represented.

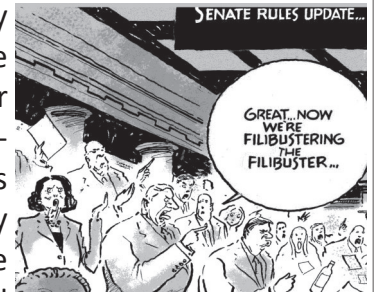
The Brennan Center for Justice, a New York think tank, has counted 532 bills designed to make voting more difficult. These bills have been found across 43 states. These restrictions on voting access unlevel the playing field. The For the People Act, if passed by the Senate and signed by the President, would, through federal legislation, prevent states from enacting laws designed to suppress the vote.

The For the People Act has almost zero chance of passing in the Senate. The reason for this is an arcane rule of the Senate called the filibuster. The filibuster makes the threshold for passing most bills at 60 votes. With the Senate now having a 50-50 split, there are not enough votes to pass this legislation.



If we look at the history of today's filibuster, we will find that it is a vestige of the Jim Crow laws. The roots of the Jim Crow laws began as early as 1865, immediately following the ratification of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which abolished slavery in the United States. Black Codes were established, in part, to take voting rights away from freed slaves. The filibuster rule is a relic of this thinking. It has a long history of impeding civil rights legislation.

The Senate has options. It can eliminate the filibuster in its entirety or it can remove the 60-vote threshold for particular types of legislation. These actions only require a majority vote. This is called the Nuclear Option and has been used before. Most recently, the filibuster has been removed for the appointment of Supreme Court justices.



We now find ourselves at a critical time in history. For a democracy to endure it requires an actively participating voting population. Anything that impedes the people's ability to exercise their voting franchise must be eliminated. If the filibuster stands in the way of this historic opportunity to ensure voter rights, then it must be removed. The difference between a democracy and an autocracy is free and fair elections.

*Stewart Mortman retired as an Assistant Principal from the New Rochelle Public Schools. He serves as NYSRSAS Chairperson of Political Action.*

**WINTER QUARTERLY QUERY—THE GOVERNMENT WE DESERVE**

In the last issue of the newsletter, we presented the quote (author unknown), “A country has the government it deserves.” Here are the responses from two of our Board members:

*People get the government they deserve. When the populace seeks easy answers to complex problems, citizens become targets for demagogues who find scapegoats for problems and claim that only they can provide a solution. The best examples are Germany in the 1930s and the United States in 2016. Both nations had democratic systems, but both had many citizens facing economic and cultural concerns. Germans willingly accepted Hitler’s claim that the loss of World War I and a treaty which caused economic dislocation were the result of the actions of wealthy Jewish citizens. Their blind faith led to the Holocaust and the destruction of Germany in World War II. While not as extreme, many Americans accepted Trump’s racist rhetoric, believing he would act to correct economic inequities and threats to white supremacy. This led to increased polarization which resulted in an uncontrolled pandemic spreading across the nation, causing significant social and economic disruption. In both countries, democratic societies allowed demagogues to corrupt institutions, thus weakening society. In the end, citizens found their nations weaker or destroyed and it was their fault.*

**Edward Price**

*I have a problem with the quote, “A country has the government it deserves.” I reject its cynicism and its over-simplification of the complex realities of both the politics and the culture of the America we are living in. No citizen deserves to have difficulty finding a home or getting a mortgage because of the color of his or her skin. No child deserves lower quality educational facilities and programs because s/he lives in a less wealthy community. Nobody deserves to be ridiculed or bullied online or in person. Our American experiment was based on an assumption that the “will of the people” would result in the formation of a government that would serve the needs of the populace. However, in recent years, we’ve seen that wealth and power have become far too influential. So corporations “buy” votes with lobbying and campaign contributions*

*and political parties put “winning” above “serving.” What we deserve is a government that truly looks to improve the lives of all its citizens. I think the hard work of many individuals contributed to some positive changes in our government in 2020 but it was a mixed bag. If things are to improve further, as individuals we all need to reject fear-mongering and one-sided thinking. We need to accept that helping others doesn’t have to mean losing something ourselves even if it may mean “sharing” a bit more than we have in the past. We need to practice respect for each other and not just demand it for ourselves.*

**Pat Galaskas**



**Quarterly Query  
SPRING 2021**



**“NO TAXATION WITHOUT REPRESENTATION”**

So say over 700,000 people who live in the District of Columbia. As a federal district, they are represented in the House by a delegate who is permitted to vote in committees, but not on the House floor. They have no voice in the Senate. Recently, pressure has intensified around proposals to make Washington, D.C. the 51<sup>st</sup> state, thus giving its citizens the full representations and voting rights enjoyed by residents of the other 50 states.

We would be interested in learning how our readers feel about that proposal.

**Please send your thoughts to**  
[clipsethuberman@gmail.com](mailto:clipsethuberman@gmail.com)

*(Kindly include your name and the district from which you retired.)*

**We hope to hear from you!**

**IN MEMORIAM**

**Janice Leanor Wilson (1944-2020)**

A long-term member of NYSRSAS, Janice served as principal of several Freeport schools, as President of the Freeport Teachers Association and Principals Association, and Nassau Director for the Council of Administrators and Supervisors. After moving to Ft. Pierce, FL, Janice was involved in numerous community organizations. Hers was truly a life of service.

## LESSONS FROM THE PANDEMIC

Edward Price



The past year of the pandemic brought to light several issues that have faced our nation since its inception. Perhaps the most evident of these is the on-going friction between rights of the individual and needs of the community. Many Americans, following the lead of Trump, contend that each individual has the right to determine the risk involved in not following recommended advice to prevent spread of the virus. They do not want to wear masks, follow social distancing, or refrain from gathering in large groups. They contend that if they contract the disease, it is a personal choice.

On the other hand, some people believe that these individualists endanger the community by spreading the disease as they come in contact with others in grocery stores, banks, and other public places. Their behavior is viewed as irresponsible by public health officials and political leaders attempting to stem the outbreak. These two views exacerbated political division and prevented a unified approach to a national crisis.

The pandemic also revealed issues regarding equality and inequality. Certainly, the virus attacked everyone, both rich and poor. Well-to-do people with some of the world's best physicians and hospitals and cutting-edge medicines died. However, a closer analysis of the data reveals that a much greater percentage of poor and people of

color were stricken by the virus. They have less access to medical care, have more weakening conditions such as diabetes and obesity, and have jobs that require them to interact with the public, often without proper protective equipment. The new Pandemic Relief Law recognizes the gravity of inequality and begins to address the concerns.

The pandemic put the best and worst characteristics of Americans in stark relief. Attacks on our Asian neighbors reveal the deep racism in society. Although these actions may not be as severe as the forced internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, they reflect major issues that continue to haunt the United States. However, we also have seen people step in to assist and support sick and elderly neighbors with no expectation of reward. While we are appalled by racist attacks, it seems that most Americans are kind and caring people who understand community. Hopefully, the best aspects of our culture will endure in the future.

Perhaps the most important lesson learned in the last year is the need to find the best in each day and appreciate our friends and family. We learned that situations change rapidly and unexpectedly. We cannot always put important things off for another day.

*Dr. Edward Price served as superintendent in several NY and NJ districts. He is currently a lecturer in educational leadership at Stony Brook University.*



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