

Two-Minute Warning

by Hon. Michael Warren
Oakland County Circuit Court
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Clinton Eastwood and Chrysler believe that America is at halftime. We should be so lucky. By my play clock, we have hit the two-minute warning. All of our major institutions are cracking at the foundation, the Great Recession's stranglehold is still tight, we are in a seemingly endless war, and our politics are increasingly corrosive.

Still, Eastwood and Chrysler have a superb point – America has come back from far worse times, stronger and more invigorated than before. We have defeated the British Empire, survived a Civil War, vanquished the Kaiser, recovered from the Great Depression, crushed the Nazis, and slain Osama bin Laden. In fact, I have no doubt that like the Motor City, our economy will roar again, and we will annihilate the terrorists.

What is different this time, why it really is the two-minute warning, is that we are defeating ourselves. We face a crisis of the American spirit – we are losing what it means to be an American.

For the last couple of generations, we have done an exceedingly poor job of teaching our students and public about the basics of our constitutional republic. As a free people, we are responsible for our own fate. To be responsible, we must be educated about our Constitution and its underlying First Principles. Instead, we have focused education on anything but civics and history.

We have put the first things last. It is no wonder that studies upon studies reveal that large swaths of our K-12 students, college graduates, and general public are woefully ignorant about the very basis of our liberties.

Thomas Jefferson explained that the most important reason for public education was “that of rendering the people safe, as they are the ultimate guardians of their own liberty.” Founding Father Dr. Benjamin Rush was more blunt – he supported public schools because each citizen “must watch the state as if its liberties depended on his vigilance alone. ...”

Accordingly, public education was designed to ensure that citizens have a basic, working knowledge of our Constitution and history. This is vital because unlike any other nation, America was founded on a set of First Principles that are articulated in the Declaration of Independence and embodied in our Constitution: the rule of law, equality, the Social Compact, unalienable rights, limited government, and the right to alter or abolish an oppressive government.

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The dysfunctionality of our political class is perhaps most evident in its damning omissions – in the failure of politicians to even acknowledge our founding First Principles during the policy debates of the day.

But all is not lost. Eastwood and Chrysler can be vindicated if we take it upon ourselves – while we still can – to address the crisis. Like the Motor City, Michigan should lead the nation in renewing the American spirit by permanently recognizing Patriot Week and by establishing an American Freedom Curriculum.

Started in Michigan by my then-10-year-old daughter and me in 2009, Patriot Week is celebrated September 11 (the anniversary of the terror attacks) through September 17 (the anniversary of the signing of the Constitution), and renews America's spirit by celebrating our First Principles, Founding Fathers and other great patriots, key documents and speeches, and historical flags. This grassroots effort, celebrated by adults and children, has caught on like wildfire not only across Michigan, but in several states. Schools, businesses, rotaries, senior centers, community groups, libraries, bar associations and others have joined the effort. Bills passed in both chambers of the Michigan Legislature are pending to permanently recognize the week.

The Oakland County Bar, including its Diversity Committee, has been at the cutting edge of this movement. With the generous aid of Cooley Law School's Auburn Hills

campus, we have hosted some extraordinarily interesting and engaging, high-quality panel discussions about the Declaration of Independence, individual liberty, and the Constitution. We will be having an encore performance this year. In addition, Oakland County lawyers have literally filled up the Oakland Circuit Court's courtrooms to participate in mock trials that are at the heart of our Constitution Day activities (in which hundreds of local middle and high school students learn about the Constitution).

Patriot Week should be complimented with an American Freedom Curriculum that should have specific expectations for students in each grade. Focusing on the First Principles, the curriculum should comprehensively address civics and American history. Annual testing, individualized learning and Patriot Week should all be key components of the curriculum.

Patriot Week, combined with a robust American Freedom Curriculum, would make Michigan the leading state in renewing the American spirit for generations to come. To do nothing only ensures that we waste the two-minute warning, and game over for America.

Hon. Michael Warren is an Oakland County Circuit Court judge, co-creator of Patriot Week (PatriotWeek.org), author of "America's Survival Guide," and a former member of the State Board of Education.



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