

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

LESSON 10 SESSION 02

10.5 Importance of active citizenship.

Good government is the particular responsibility of the individual citizen in whom final authority is vested. It will be no higher in its ideals nor just in its administration than the sum of our national character.

The first and paramount duty of every citizen is to have a firsthand knowledge of the Constitution of the United States.

He should learn the accurate, comprehensive, and masterly statement of the six principles of government as contained in the Preamble, and the plan for setting up and maintaining our representative form of government. It is in this document that individual rights and fundamental duties are set forth.

American citizens are stockholders in a great corporation — the Government of the United States.

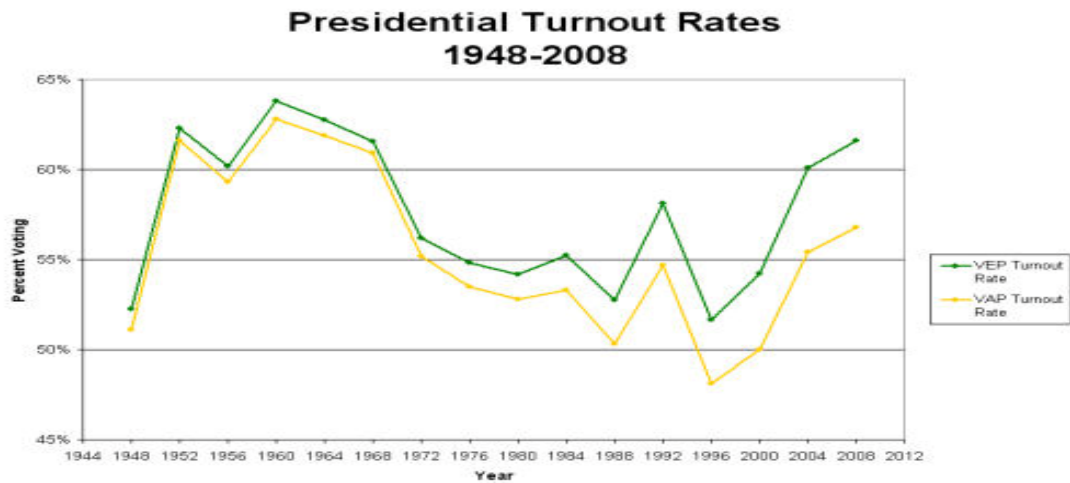
They annually spend three and one-half billion dollars in the cost of government. One citizen out of 13 gainfully employed works for this corporation. Its operation requires understanding, supervision, and skillful management.

The citizen is the governor of this Republic through the exercise of his right to vote — the most sacred right of a free people. He selects its rulers and decides its issues. The proper exercise of this right requires honesty and intelligence, and a knowledge concerning the dangerous tendencies that are threatening our republican form of government. He should weigh the merits of both men and issues, feeling he is responsible for the selection of proper persons as the representatives to whom are entrusted the affairs of government.

10.5.1 Vote.

To preserve American institutions a bigger and better vote is required — citizens must perform their political duties on Election Day.

The entire electorate must be taught not only to vote but to vote according to principle and informed opinion. Our institutions are endangered and are well worth saving. In the presidential years of 1920 and 1924 scarcely half of the voters of the country went to the polls. In 1926 only 33 per cent of the electorate participated. The ultimate result of such indifference upon a government based upon the principle of the majority is disastrous. Just look at the chart to see what is happening since then.



In 1928 more than 7,000,000 young citizens became eligible to vote for the first time. While the vote and the whole vote should be attracted to the polls, it must be remembered that an unintelligent vote safeguards nothing and is harmful in its effect.

This election in 2012 there will be 16,000,000 more of them eligible to vote.

10.5.2 Public service.

Many citizens are so engrossed in their personal affairs that they are not willing to devote sufficient time to the business of government, leaving most important matters to be decided by a minority.

The functions of citizenship are not confined to the enjoyment of personal rights — they also involve the protection of those rights. Unless the obligations of the individual citizen are fulfilled, our entire governmental structure, with all of its rights and privileges, is endangered. The indifference of individual citizens threatens the destruction of the "blessings of liberty."

Opportunity for patriotic service calls for leadership and ability, and too many citizens fail to respond to this obligation. Every citizen should assist in the administration of law and justice by willingness to render jury service — nothing is more imperative.

He should bear a proportionate part of the burden of taxation without an attempt at evasion. He should respect the rights of others both by precept and example. He should be willing to assume the duties of any public office to which his fellow citizens may call him. He should be useful and loyal, aiding in all public undertakings through a whole-hearted cooperation for the welfare of all.

In every national emergency the people have produced their leader — George Washington, Abraham Lincoln. When diplomacy has failed, as in the World War, the people have "volunteered."