



STATE OF MINNESOTA
DISTRICT COURT OF MINNESOTA
EIGHTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

CHAMBERS AT
KANDIYOHI COUNTY COURTHOUSE
505 BECKER AVENUE S.W.
WILLMAR, MN 56201
TELEPHONE (320) 231-6206
FAX (320) 231-6276
E-mail: michael.thompson@courts.state.mn.us

JUDGE MICHAEL J. THOMPSON

March 19, 2018

Representative Dean Urdahl
473 State Office Building
100 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155-1206

RE: Civics In Public Education

Dear Dean:

It was nice to speak to you about your proposal to require civics classes as part of the core requirement for graduation from High School. I heartily agree with this concept.

In my role as a district court judge, I see on a daily basis people who have basically no understanding how our system of government is set up. There is a lack of awareness that we have a representative form of government. There is a lack of awareness that the legislature enacts laws, not the Governor or the Courts. There is essentially no awareness of what "separation of powers" means.

The basic freedoms contained in both the United States and Minnesota Constitutions are not understood. Freedom of speech, and the history of this right, is a foundation of this country. Yet one constantly hears that speech should be limited due to its political or "politically incorrect" content. This comes from both the right and the left. Education on this important provision would help clear up the misconceptions that seek to limit our rights in this area.

As for the branch of government that I work in, most people rely on headlines to inform them as to our role. Most of our important decisions are written, and often are lengthy, as the facts are laid out, and the law applied to them. But in reality, very few people take the time to actually read what a decision is...they base their decision as to its validity on a two minute soundbite.

And when it comes to criminal trials, people don't realize that a jury has spent hours and hours listening to all of the evidence, and that a conviction requires proof beyond a reasonable doubt. Instead, the public bases its perception on the charge itself or 30 seconds of video.

I know that since the 1970s, civics classes have become electives, and in many cases, basically non-existent. Priority has been put on the three "Rs", and now the sciences. These are important. But for our society to survive, it is also important that our citizens understand the basic concepts of our constitutions and governmental structure. I often say that bad facts make bad law. The bad fact in this case is that most people do not understand our system of government.

You are free to use this as an endorsement of your bill to education the young people of this state about our government and constitutions. I hope it passes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. J. Thompson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Michael J. Thompson
Chief Judge, 8th Judicial District