

**We the People Competition for Districts One, Three and Five  
January 13, 2010**

Thank you to the Classroom Law Project, Marilyn Cover Lake Oswego High for hosting this event and to the teachers and volunteers of tonight's program for the honor of speaking.

And congratulations to all the participants at tonight's competition. You are all winners in my book.

Judging Unit 6, on the challenges faced by our Constitutional democracy, brought back a flood of memories.

Summer of 1974:

I was 15 years old growing up in DC

Watergate, Nixon, constitutional crisis.

Article 1, Section 2. The Impeachment Clause, and

Article 2, Section 4 The High Crimes and Misdemeanors Clause.

On July 27, 1974, the House Judiciary Committee voted on 3 articles of impeachment.

The entire country was watching on TV

I was in the room.

You see, my father, Hamilton Fish, was one of a handful of Republicans to support the articles. He knew it could cost him his job.

My first real world civics lesson.

Summer of 1980:

21 year old college junior.

Volunteered for my first campaign: Barney Frank, Democrat for congress. Then worked for him in DC.

I went from spectator to participant.

My father and Barney Frank helped to shape my life, and the course I followed.

Each of us has an opportunity – some would say obligation – to serve our community. The options are limitless. My only advice: follow your passion.

Over the past 30 years, I served on non-profit boards, community boards, and task forces. I volunteered for numerous non-profits. I practiced law, representing people whose civil rights had been violated. I even hosted a public affairs TV show. (My daughter, now a junior at Lincoln, once told me I had a face for radio.)

In 2009, I was elected to the Portland city Council. It took three tries. Who said following your passion would be easy?

After tonight, I am confident each of you will find your path, and make a contribution.

But I am not worried about you. I am worried about our fellow citizens who are becoming increasingly disengaged and cynical about government.

The pollster Adam Davis recently told the City Club of Portland that too many Oregonians are “flunking the civics test.”

Here is some of the alarming data:

40% of Oregonians don't know we have two US senators.

70% can't name one of our senators.

30% can't name a single tax that pays for public services.

We cannot continue to make progress as a nation if we don't tackle this problem.

And that's where you come in.

The “We the People” program is designed to give you the tools to be effective and engaged citizens. To be, in the words of Grant high school student Patrick Streckert, “ a designated driver for a country.”

So tonight I want to challenge each of you, our designate drivers, to continue these great debates about role of the citizen and our constitution.

And to move from spectator to participant.

During your high school years, your college years, and throughout your adult lives.

History teaches us that one person can make a difference. Many of you are already making a difference.

And as you leave tonight, please don't forget to thank the parent, and teacher, volunteer supporter and coach who supported you tonight. They are great role models as you begin your civic journey.