



We are the ones we have been waiting for...

By: Dr. Randell E. Trammell, Founder and CEO of Georgia Center for Civic Engagement

Ever since the emergence of ‘big picture’ shows and films from Hollywood, there is an all-too-familiar storyline...in fact, my five-year-old daughter has recognized this in Disney films. The main character encounters a “bad guy” and waits for the “good guy” to save the day.

It has now been just over a month since the unfathomable Capitol insurrection and there’s still a great uneasiness felt in the air. Those on the left and those on the right have staunchly taken their respective corners. Everyone is looking for someone to blame for our current state of affairs—and at the same time, looking for a solution to fix the issue.

Dr. Peter Levine, wrote a book entitled “We are the ones we have been waiting for”, the title I have also given this article. After offering an innovative theory of active citizenship, a diagnosis of its decline, and a searing critique of our political institutions, Levine—one of America’s most influential civic engagement activists—argues that American citizens must address our most challenging issues.

In short, the America we have found ourselves in is one that we have allowed to be created by omission of an emphasis on civic instruction and social studies in the past two decades. The No Child Left Behind Act of the George W Bush Administration bolstered STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), but the unintended consequence is what was pushed aside for the additional emphasis, which included the arts and social studies. In fact, a recent whitepaper, iCivics one of the country’s leading civic education organizations, noted, “the Federal Government spends \$50 per year per student on STEM education, while spending only five cents per year per student on civics.” That was not a typo—the investment in civic education per student is one shiny nickel.

In Georgia, a piece of legislation has been filed in the House (Bill 589) and in the Senate (Bill 220) creating the Georgia Commission on Civic Education. The purpose of the Commission is to 1) educate students on the importance of civic involvement in a constitutional republic, 2) promote the study of local and state government, and 3) enhance communication and collaboration among organizations in the state that conducts civics education. The bi-partisan Commission, as proposed, will be composed of 15 members including civic educators, Senators and Representatives, a representative from the Georgia Department of Education, a Supreme Court Justice, representatives from the Georgia Chamber and Metro Atlanta Chamber, and myself representing the Georgia Center for Civic Engagement (GCCE). Our sole purpose at the GCCE is to educate and equip students to become informed and active citizens.

Nationally, there is a bi-partisan movement to make a serious and overdue investment in civic education through the Educating for Democracy Act, sponsored by Sen. Chris Coons, D-Delaware, and Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas. Their proposal, expected to be reintroduced in a few weeks, would authorize \$1 billion a year for civics and history education. It would provide grants to states, universities and education groups.

“Civic engagement is crucial for the health of our democracy,” Coons said in the announcement, adding that the bill would “equip new generations of Americans with deeper understanding of their responsibilities as citizens and how to exercise their cherished rights.”

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We have two options before us: wait and hope that the “good guys” will come and save us and right the wrongs, or take action now. As Levine suggested, I believe that we are the ones we have been waiting for and we must take action. I invite you to join me in asking your state legislators to support the Georgia Commission on Civics Education and ask our Congressmen and Senators to lead the effort for this Educating for Democracy Act with their support by signing on as co-sponsors.

For additional information, you may reach Dr. Randell E. Trammell by email (randell@georgiacivics.org) or by phone 770-455-9622.

Dr. Randell E. Trammell is the Founder and CEO of the Georgia Center for Civic Engagement, which exists to educate and equip students to become informed and active citizens. Trammell is a nationally recognized leader in civic education and youth civic engagement and works closely with school districts across the country in developing policies and programs to bolster civic ideals.

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