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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

May 6, 2021

Representative Teresa Alonso Leon, Chair
Committee on Education

Ref: SB 513

Chair Alonso Leon, Honorable Colleagues:

Thank you for your ongoing consideration of SB 513 – the 21st Civics Education Act. It is my understanding there will be an additional “informational meeting” on the measure on May 13, 2021. It is fitting that you discuss the value of Civics Education as a part of the formal curriculum on that date because it is a special one: May 13, 2003, was the first day I “lost” a subordinate member of my team in combat operations (outside of An Nasiriyah, Iraq). Truth be told, I had brought men and women home wounded during combat operations, but May 13, 2003, was the first time a crew member of mine was killed (three additional crew members were wounded that day, two men and a woman).

Over the next several weeks, I will continue to seek out opportunities for demonstrating the critical importance of a cohesive, mandatory civics background for students. As most of you know, I have chief sponsored various iterations of SB 513 since elected to the Oregon Legislature in 2014. Although I can make (and often have) the case for the rationale of a comprehensive civics education based upon the inherent dynamics of a government dependent upon the wisdom of an informed electorate, I am sharing with you the underlying reasons for my absolute commitment to this cause: the US cannot likely long endure absent an informed citizenry – something the past five years has demonstrated – whatever your party or passion, our nation, state, and communities desperately require a renewal of civic engagement only possible when people understand the government they are.

SB 513 is not the Panacea, but it is a well-considered tool that will move us forward. Civics Education is the necessary component for the security, sustainability of a Republic based upon Democratic Ideals. Whatever the near-term tactical arguments for “pushing this down the road” (again), I want each, every one of you to know this is a personal fight for me. I shall continue to do anything, everything ethically and legally available, to advance this strategic investment in the defense of the US and Oregon against the enemies of Democracy: divisions based upon misinformation, malignant disengagement, community disinterest, greed, and selfishness. We will either renew the spark of an aspirational nation, or we will falter and then fail.

In conclusion, I respectfully ask you to ignore the voices of the very few, very powerful organizations now intent on defeating this bill. Their long-term hostility toward the concept is regrettable. As a dues-paying member of one of the organizations fighting SB 513, I assure you that on this matter, at least, they do not speak for many of us in the classroom. Our choices on this matter reflect our values; we either believe in the importance of civics or not. Thank you for your consideration. Please let me know if you have any questions or require additional information on this matter.

Respectfully,