

696.92k Reach

## Daily Herald opinion: New civics initiative can help us all be smarter voters

Not enough Americans know enough about the Constitution, and that doesn't bode well for the republic. But help is on the way.

This editorial is a consensus opinion of the Daily Herald Editorial Board.



It's dismaying, if not particularly shocking, that one in four American adults could not name any of the three branches of the federal government. This, according to an Annenberg Public Policy Center survey conducted last year.

We'll assume, given that you're reading a newspaper, that you're among the 47% who could name all three.

After a few years of Americans showing progress in understanding how government works, 2022's annual survey marked a decline in understanding about how laws are made and enforced and the rock-paper-scissors nature of how the three branches -- the executive, legislative and judicial -- interact and which wins out under which circumstances.

Given the Supreme Court's overturn of *Roe v. Wade*, the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol and the raging debate over assault weapons, it's disheartening how the social media discussion of the workings of government seems to be growing inversely proportionate to our understanding of it.

There is nothing quite as dangerous to a democratic form of government as a lack of understanding of its underpinnings.

The Sandra Day O'Connor Institute for American Democracy aims to change that.

The institute, named for the 93-year-old retired associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court (A Reagan appointee), is launching Civics For Life, a free, online adult civics education series for those interested in learning more about civics and expressing themselves more knowledgeably on the topic.

"We have a complex system of government. You have to teach it to every generation," O'Connor said, according to a news release on the new educational series.

The institute's president and CEO, Sarah Suggs, said, "We believe being informed and participating in your community and government is a simple and effective recipe for being the best citizen you can be and preserving our system of government, no matter one's political views."

We certainly are proponents of that.

Civics For Life will provide user-friendly educational material, online communities that illustrate productive discussion, debates with thought leaders, access to online conversations with people who share a broad range of political ideas on a variety of topics and examples for how civics affects us in our daily lives.

This should be a boon for those of us who didn't get much access to civics instruction in school or for whom it's been a while.

With a more informed electorate, misinformation and propaganda is much less likely to get a foothold. Our hope is that informed discourse might drown out the kind of poorly reasoned speech and ad hominem attacks that now are tearing the country apart.

To learn more about Civics for Life or to donate, visit [CivicsforLife.org](https://civicsforlife.org) (<https://civicsforlife.org/>)

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