



Instilling patriotism in today's youth

Richard Eckstrom

Friday, April 11, 2014 at 6:00 am (Updated: April 11, 6:01 am)

It's often noted that today's young people don't have a strong sense of patriotism like their parents and grandparents did.

Young people still love America and understand the importance of serving a cause greater than themselves. But it's hard to ignore the fact that love of country and patriotic values aren't instilled in young people today the way they were years ago.

In my old-fashioned view of things, one reason for this is because the abundances of our great nation have distracted us from teaching our children how all this abundance became possible.

But we also ought to admit that part of the decline in patriotism comes from the new politically correct culture within our education system. And that's not just my old-fashioned opinion. A recent report by a panel of national academic leaders notes that United States public schools have turned away from promoting patriotism.

The report, which was commissioned by Stanford University and the University of Washington-Seattle, is mainly an academic study of civics education in the United States. Interestingly, it includes a few paragraphs about why the subject of patriotism is no longer part of civics curricula.

According to the report of these two West Coast institutions, "the concept of patriotism itself has become contested in United States schools for a number of reasons." It goes on to explain that those reasons include "the belief that the 21st century students' affiliation should be to global citizenship and worldwide human rights."

That's a real shame. Today's young people are tomorrow's public servants. They need to understand the greatness of America – and the sacrifices that so many have made in the name of our freedom –in order to fully appreciate their blessings.

America needs more red, white and blue in our schools, not less.

Thank goodness for groups like the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), whose members are working to instill patriotism in today's younger generation. Among its worthwhile programs, the VFW hosts essay contests each year for students in grades six-12.

The VFW's "Voice of Democracy" competition is an audio-essay contest that's open to students in grades nine-12. The national winner this year will receive a \$30,000 college scholarship.

The "Patriot's Pen" competition is open to students in grades six to eight. This year, students are asked to reflect on the statement, "Why I Appreciate America's Veterans." The national winner will receive \$5,000.

These contests opened in late March, and the deadline to submit an essay is Nov. 1. Essays can be submitted at local VFW posts. To be sure, the students who win will be fortunate for their winnings. But we'll all win as these young competitors come to understand, in the words of Ronald Reagan, that America is a shining city on a hill and that its promises are boundless.

We already owe our war veterans a debt we can never repay. Their commitment to today's young students and their determination to keep patriotism alive deepen the gratitude we owe them.

Richard Eckstrom is comptroller general