



# PRESIDENT'S PAGE

By Tim Newsom

## BUILDING A BETTER AMERICA ONE LAWYER AT A TIME

My sister-in-law, Vicky Newsom, was born and raised in London, England. Vicky won a tennis scholarship from an American university and moved to the states where she met my brother, Tommy. They married and started a family. Vicky then decided to become an American citizen. She began the lengthy process culminating in a citizenship ceremony. Tommy's family and my parents attended the ceremony. My dad, who was wearing a tie decorated with the American flag, noticed one of the other new inductees, a Hispanic male in his early thirties, was upset that he forgot to wear a necktie. The new inductee wanted to dress appropriately for this special occasion. My dad took off his tie and gave it to the young man. When our new countryman tried to return the tie after the ceremony, my dad told him to keep the tie as a keepsake. With tears in his eyes, the young American kept the tie and promised to proudly wear it. I am confident he did.

Contrast that touching scene with the "Jaywalking" interviews conducted by former Tonight Show host Jay Leno. With a camera and microphone, Mr. Leno would ask natural born citizens to answer questions on the Citizenship Exam, such as who we fought in the Revolutionary War, the number of stars in the American flag, and the name of the current Vice President. Nine out of ten times the interviewee failed miserably. The live audience laughed. The TV audience laughed. Some people thought the interviews were staged. I am not so confident they were staged.

Unfortunately, I believe the Tonight Show, not a citizenship ceremony, more closely mirrors the state of our society's view toward our country. Too many Americans are apathetic and complacent. A recent study by the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life at the University of Texas revealed that in 2010 Texas ranked last in the nation in voter turnout. The March 2014 Texas primaries drew only 1.9 million voters when there were 18.9 million adults in the state and 13.6 million of them were registered to vote. On a local level, the Texas Secretary of State reported that in 2010 Potter/Randall Counties had 130,115 registered voters. However, less than 15,000 people voted in the 2011 mayoral race for the City of Amarillo. Sadly, more than 15,000 people would fill Dick Bivins Stadium if the Dallas Cowboys announced they were coming to Amarillo to stretch and jog.

The apathy of our citizens is a real problem. However, people that simply raise problems but do not offer solutions cause me great frustration. Therefore, I want to offer some simple methods to inspire those that simply take-for-granted the democratic system our forefathers, and even our current servicemen and servicewomen, have fought, suffered, and died to protect.

First, law firms should host their entire staff to paid monthly luncheons where

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a lawyer in the firm makes a simple presentation on a particular client, case, or fundamental constitutional right. All of these presentations will emphasize, either directly or indirectly, why we are a democratic nation built on the rule of law. This will arm your staff members with the knowledge they need when confronted with apathetic sidewalk interviewees at the coffee shop, restaurant, and other gathering places. These meetings will also promote a team concept, because your staff will hear you talk about a legal problem that they helped resolve. Your team will then spread the word.

Second, lawyers must encourage their clients to be an educated electorate and vote. Lawyers can provide clients with balanced resources to research the candidates and cast a wise ballot. Lawyers can also provide clients with information related to legislation that will affect them and the legal problems lawyers have handled, or are currently handling, for them. We must encourage our clients to become engaged in the process and not rely upon slanted television news or talk radio garbage.

Third, lawyers must take the initiative to speak at civic organizations, schools, and businesses on the rights given to us by the Constitution. All of these organizations are in constant need of people to speak on topics of interest. Of these different forums, I believe schools are the most vital. If we want to create and sustain positive change, then we must educate and depend upon the generations that follow us.

Fourth, before you speak to any of these people or groups, go online and buy a pocket Constitution. They cost

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\$1.00 each and Amazon will ship a box of them to your office. Give every listener a pocket Constitution. You can afford it. While people can download the Constitution on their iPhone and iPad for free, you must give them one that they can hold, feel, and put in their pocket. A pocket Constitution is a reminder unlike a library of apps that clutter the screen and go largely unused.

Finally, all of you are smart, educated, and creative. All of you can and will think of ideas to beat American apathy and complacency. You must share those ideas with the rest of us, so we can use them to benefit everyone. I do not for one second believe I have the thought-monopoly on this topic. Spread the word one lawyer at a time and over time we can change our city, state, and nation.