***We the People: the Citizen & the Constitution***

2019-2020 High School Hearing Questions

Information, Tips, Analysis, & Resources from the Oregon high school We the People community

Unit 6 / Q. 2

**“The Americans, on the contrary, are fond of explaining almost all the actions of their lives by the principle of interest rightly understood; they show with complacency how an enlightened regard for themselves constantly prompts them to assist each other, and inclines them willingly to sacrifice a portion of their time and property to the welfare of the State.”\* What is the meaning of the concept of self-interest rightly understood, and does it still apply today?**

* What role, if any, does participating in civil society have for a well-functioning democracy?
* Should schools require community service in order to promote the concept of self-interest rightly understood? Why or why not?

\* Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2002), 484.

**Collaboration Tips**

**7** different questions are in this overall question.

Historical events/context that connects to this question:

* **French Revolutions**
* **Tocqueville’s visit to US and his book “On Democracy”**
* **Drafting the US Constitution**

Sections of the Constitution:

* **Article 1, Sec. 8**

Possible Current Events:

* **Walmart**
* **Clean Air Act - CA**
* **Serving in Trump administration**

Possible Court Cases:

* ***Boyscouts v. Dale***
* ***Rotary Int. v. Rotary Clubs***

**Comments from Justice Jack Landau:**

*The key here is self-interest "rightly understood." There are several approaches to self-interest in political theory. There's greed, or "unenlightened self-interest," which is generally regarded as a bad thing, because it is unlikely that there will be a net benefit to society. Although objectivists like Ayn Rand argue that "rational selfishness" is the only defensible approach and that there will be societal benefits as byproducts. Critics suggest that such "rational egoism" privileges short-term interests over long-term ones; it is sometimes better -- even for the individual -- to postpone immediate individual interests for long-term societal interests. Then there's enlightened self-interest, the idea that the ultimate self-interest is what is in the best interests of the society as a whole. This latter is most likely what the quote refers to. It's another way of getting at the idea of civic virtue -- individual acts for the common welfare of the community.*