

More Teens Can Name Three Stooges Than Can Name Three Branches of Government

WASHINGTON, D.C. (September 2, 1998) A new national survey released today at a US Senate hearing shows that when asked, more American teenagers can name three of the Three Stooges than can name the three branches of government (59% to 41%) know the Fresh Prince of Bel-Air than know the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court (94.7% to 2.2%) know which city has the zip code "90210" than the city in which the US Constitution was written (75% to 25%), and know the star of the motion picture "Titanic" than know the Vice President of the United States (90% to 74%).

These are just a few of the findings in an annual survey sponsored by the National Constitution Center (NCC) and released today prior to Constitution Week, September 17 - 23, marking the 211th anniversary of the signing of the US Constitution. This year's survey compared teens' knowledge of the Constitution to their knowledge of pop culture. The survey results were released at a hearing of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education and Related Agencies chaired by Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA).

"These results are alarming for everyone who cares about the future of our democracy," said Philadelphia Mayor Edward G. Rendell, Chairman of NCC. "The Constitution doesn't work by itself. It depends on active, informed citizens. And that's who these kids are: our future citizens."

"But we shouldn't view these poll results as an indictment of our teens," Rendell cautioned. Rendell pointed to survey analysis showing that teens whose parents discussed politics and current events with them regularly scored better than their peers. "This poll tells us that we all must work to better understand our Constitution. Because kids learn most of all from the example set by adults around them."

"It is no surprise to us that teens know more about pop culture than the Constitution but it is shocking that the gap is so wide," said Joseph Torsella, the NCC's President. "Ironically, it is the very essence of the Constitution that enables such a vibrant pop culture in this country. We need to do a better job helping our kids to understand that without their Constitution, most of their pop culture icons would not exist and the open and free communication they live with every day wouldn't flourish."

"This poll also shows us how to communicate this important knowledge to kids," Torsella added. "The results tells us that when teens feel something is interesting and relevant to their lives, they are open and ready to learn. The stories behind the Constitution are interesting and relevant; its our job to present them that way. If teens can understand the "girl power" mantra of the Spice Girls, then they can

understand the history - and the relevancy - of the women's suffragette movement."

Rendell and Torsella were joined at the hearing by Dr. Richard Beeman of the University of Pennsylvania, a distinguished scholar of early American history. Beeman emphasized the importance of constitutional knowledge in preserving our freedoms. "Our founding fathers understood that our system of democratic government came with no guarantees. Not in 1787, or today. They knew that the new republic would require active, informed citizen involvement to preserve, protect, and defend it."

The nation-wide telephone survey contacted 600 teenagers between the ages of 13 and 17. The survey's margin of error is + 4%. The survey was conducted by Luntz Research Company, assisted by Shepardson Stern & Kaminsky.

Key findings of the survey include:

Paired Questions (answers in parentheses)

% Correct

In what city was the US Constitution written? (Philadelphia)

25.5%

In what city would you find the zip code 90210? (Beverly Hills)

75.2%

Name the Vice President of the United States. (Al Gore)

73.8%

Name the male star of the movie Titanic. (Leonardo DiCaprio)

89.7%

How many US Senators are there? (100)

21.2%

How many brothers are there in the musical group "Hanson"? (3)

81.2%

What are the first three words of the Constitution? ("We the People")

35.5%

What are the first three letters after "http" of almost every website address?

(www)

71.2%

What does the fifth amendment protect? (Double Jeopardy/Self-Incrimination/Right to a Grand Jury/Due Process/Compensation for Private Property Taken for Public Use)

25.0%

What does the device "The Club" protect? (car)

63.7%

In which century did American women obtain the right to vote? (20th)

54.3%

Which musical band celebrates "girl power"? (Spice Girls)

92.8%

Name the three branches of the federal government. (Executive, Judicial, Legislative)

41.2%

Name as many of the Three Stooges as you can. (Curly/Larry/Moe/Shemp/Curly Joe)

59.2%

How old do you have to be to vote in a national election for president? (18)

90.8%

How old do you have to be to see a rated R movie in a theater without a parent or guardian? (17)

65.3%

Who is the Chief Justice of the United States? (William Rehnquist)

2.2%

Who played the Fresh Prince of Bel-Air on Television? (Will Smith)

94.7%

What are the first ten amendments to the Constitution known as? (Bill of Rights)

44.8%

What comedian/talkshow host is known for his nightly "Top Ten List"? (David Letterman)

53.0%

Who is currently the Speaker of the House in the United States Congress? (Newt Gingrich)

32.7%

Who stars as the father of the house in TV's Home Improvement? (Tim Allen)
89.8%

Who is considered the father of the US Constitution? (James Madison)
1.8%

Who is considered the father of the computer company Microsoft? (Bill Gates)
58.3%

What landmark Supreme Court case found that separate but equal treatment for blacks and whites in public schools was unconstitutional? (Brown v. Board of Education)
9.2%

What famous football player was found not guilty of murdering his ex-wife in 1995? (OJ Simpson)
87.5%

What's the name of the town where Abraham Lincoln lived for most of his adult life and which he represented when in Congress? (Springfield)
12.2%

What's the name of the town where Bart Simpson lives? (Springfield)
74.3%

NCC invites the public to test their constitutional knowledge by visiting the web site, www.constitutioncenter.org, where the questions and answers are posted.

The National Constitution Center is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization established by Congress to increase understanding of the US Constitution and its relevance to the daily lives of Americans. It is leading the effort to build an experiential museum on Independence Mall in Philadelphia which will be the first in the world devoted to dramatically telling the story of the Constitution and its contemporary relevance. The museum will house a study center which will serve as the hub for national constitutional education; electronic town meetings and broadcast debates; and a home for visiting scholars and experts. The museum is scheduled to break ground on September 17, 2000 (Constitution Day). The NCC also provides quality educational programming, including a web site, curricula for teachers, and a Constitution Day program in all 50 states.