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Title: Miss Capital Region

Civic Literacy for American Youth

Our country is currently faced with a true crisis in citizenship. Only one out of every ten high school students can identify their United States Senators, and far more young Americans are able to correctly identify the Three Stooges or Disney's Seven Dwarfs than they are a single member of the Supreme Court. American students are learning less and less about their government despite educational studies which prove that greater civic learning coincides with more active citizenship.

We are about to embark on an open Presidential election and a year when all seats in the Virginia General Assembly will be in play. It is imperative that the Miss America Organization utilize this opportunity to cultivate a spirit of hope and efficacy amongst our nation's future leaders. Issues may change from year to year, but if we can get children interested in both knowing and caring about their government while they are in school, it will last a lifetime.

The following are highlights of my career in educating America's youth on the importance of civic literacy:

- Developed *Project: I Care* in an effort to combat the rising tide of apathy and cynicism pervasive in America's youth. Through this mission, I have had the opportunity to speak at schools all around the Commonwealth and lead students to make individual declarations of support for their government.
- Worked alongside Dr. Larry Sabato at the University of Virginia Center for Politics, and assisted Meg Heubeck, Director of Instruction at their National Youth Leadership Initiative, with a Washington, DC advocacy day to obtain federal funding for the program.
- Served on the Center for Politics panel discussion, *How to Get Political Jobs and Internships*, aimed at upcoming University of Virginia graduates.
- Regularly meet with student participants in four additional nationwide civic education organizations: Jr. Statesman Foundation, Lead America, Presidential Classroom, and the National Youth Leadership Conference. Through these programs, I am able to reach a multitude of youth each week and offer insight into how they can personally get involved in the political process.
- Featured speaker at the Northern Ireland Children's Friendship Project conference in Washington, DC, where I spoke alongside two congressmen to provide a young person's perspective on American government.
- Founded *Young Patriots* to promote civic literacy and hosted more than one hundred students from the Hampton Roads area at a rally consisting of guest speakers from the Virginia General Assembly, political trivia and voter registration opportunities.
- Addressed 1,000 students at the Richmond Key Club district convention on the importance of community involvement and *Project: I Care*.

As Miss Virginia and ultimately, Miss America, I will continue my work with *Project: I Care* and the Youth Leadership Initiative to create a powerful partnership nationwide that combines academic excellence with civic participation and community service.

When my father was a senior in high school, his principal went throughout the community raising money to send him to the first Presidential Classroom for young Americans in Washington, DC. Principal Blevins told the contributors that if they could inspire and train a single student in government, that student would return and make a difference in their city. My father did return and he became the first member of the United States Congress from our home city of Chesapeake. Through his example, and my belief in the 'power of one,' I was inspired to enter into a career of public service that could afford me the opportunity to educate and encourage young people to play a participatory role in our democracy.

Citizen apathy is rooted in the visible partisanship our government has let divide them. We often focus so much on being a Republican or Democrat that we forget about what it means to be an American. Who better than Miss America to help change the direction of our American democracy, beginning with the 2008 election cycle? From that forum, I would have the opportunity of a lifetime to lead the march and ensure that distressing civic statistics become but a footnote in history books—a problem that once existed, but is no longer feared because our youth helped America turn the corner and achieve the level of active citizenship of which our founding fathers dreamed.

Signature/Date