



## Starting Now, We Must Be Bold Citizens!

In a functioning democracy, the government is dependent upon average citizenship participation - some of us paying attention and some of us not, some of us voting and some of us not - in a non-functioning democracy, recapturing it will depend on all of us being **bold citizens** – all of us paying attention and all of us voting!

Citizenship is “the character of an individual viewed as a member of society; behavior in terms of the duties, obligations, and functions of a citizen.” The definition of abandonment, is “to withdraw one’s support or help from, especially in spite of duty, allegiance, or responsibility.” My point in comparing the definitions is that they both reference “duty.” Citizenship requires embracing the duty to our government while abandonment abdicates it.

The government is citizenship – at least in our participatory form of government because it requires self-rule to succeed. As self-governing citizens, we must work together to determine our common good and design the path to achieving it with the ultimate outcome of shaping our collective destiny.

It is no longer enough to think that voting is all citizens need to do (and too many of us don’t even to that). From this point forward, what we have done in the past as citizens to participate in and guide our country will no longer be enough. We must pay attention and participate in our country’s politics and policies all year long, not just when an election is looming. Reclaiming our democracy will require **bold citizenship**. All we have left as *We the People*, is our citizenship, the strength of our convictions, and the force of our character manifested by performing at our peak as a citizen in the United States of America. What can we do?

### **BOLD CITIZENSHIP ACTIVITIES**

1) “Blow up the phones.” Probably the easiest and most powerful action citizens can perform is to blow up the phones at an elected representative’s local office or even at Capitol and White House offices. This is a term elected officials use when so many people call on a particular issue that switchboards are shut down and phone lines are overwhelmed. What could be easier? With just about everyone owning a cell phone, it only takes entering your elected local, state, and national representatives’ phone numbers once and then they are one push away from knowing how you feel about an issue. It is best to call the local office first. They are more responsive and are in touch with the representative’s state and federal office daily. The White House switchboard number is 222-456-1111. The switchboard also has phone numbers for senators and representatives. Always be gracious and respectful when letting politicians know how you want a vote to be registered or a position to be taken. When hundreds and thousands of us call, they listen!

2) Stop or control your apathy or despair. Despair is not an option and plays into the hands of the powerful because it births abandonment. Decide what your *peak* issue is and ramp up your participation in organizations fighting for your cause. There are a dizzying number of organizations, associations, alliances, and campaigns to join. To help you decide which ones to focus on, ask yourself what inspires you to make the world a better place. After you identify the issues with which you resonate, consider joining several action groups. They require your assistance as never before. It is not only your money that they need; they need *you* as well. *Armchair activism* is worthless (email requests to sign petitions, etc.). It makes us feel good, but it is not a *super-citizenship* activity. Instead of lazily signing an email petition, call the representative yourself!

Here are a few great choices of organizations to join:

- Action for the Common Good: <http://populardemocracy.org/> action-common-good
- Alliance for a Just Society: <http://allianceforajustsociety.org>
- American Family Voices: <http://www.americanfamilyvoices.org>
- American Sustainable Business Council: <http://asbcouncil.org>
- Business for Shared Prosperity: <http://www.businessforsharedprosperity.org>
- Campaign for America's Future: <https://ourfuture.org>
- Center for American Progress: <https://www.americanprogress.org>
- Center for Community Change: <http://www.communitychange.org>
- Center of Budget and Policy Priorities: <http://www.cbpp.org>
- Citizen's Climate Lobby: <https://citizensclimatelobby.org>
- Center for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington: [www.citizensforethics.org](http://www.citizensforethics.org)
- Citizens for Tax Justice: <http://ctj.org>
- Coalition on Human Needs: <http://www.chn.org>
- Daily Kos: <http://www.dailykos.com>
- Democracy Initiative: <http://www.democracyinitiative.org>
- Main Street Alliance: <http://www.mainstreetalliance.org>
- MoveOn.org: [www.moveon.org](http://www.moveon.org)
- Move to Amend: <https://movetoamend.org>
- National People's Action: <http://npa-us.org>
- New Rules for Global Finance: <http://www.new-rules.org>
- Our Revolution: <https://ourrevolution.com>

- People Demanding Action: <http://www.peopledemandingaction.org>
- People for the American Way: <http://www.pfaw.org>
- Pocket Cause: <http://www.pocketcause.org>
- Political Research Associates: [www.politicalresearch.org](http://www.politicalresearch.org)
- Progressive Congress: <http://www.progressivecongress.org>
- Public Citizen: [www.citizen.org](http://www.citizen.org)
- Ring of Fire Network: <http://trore.com>
- Southern Poverty Law Center: [www.splcenter.org](http://www.splcenter.org)
- State of Belief: <http://stateofbelief.com>
- Sum of Us: <http://sumofus.org>
- The Nation: <http://www.thenation.com>
- The Other 98 percent: <http://other98.com>
- Truth Out: [www.truth-out.org](http://www.truth-out.org)
- United for a Fair Economy: <http://www.faireconomy.org>
- U.S. Action: <http://usaction.org>
- Voices for Progress: <http://voicesforprogress.org>
- Working America: <http://www.workingamerica.org>

3) Purchase *The Citizen Lobbyist: A How-to Manual for Making Your Voice Heard in Government* by Amanda Knief (available for less than \$8 on Amazon). It is a terrific jumpstart to getting your voice heard!

4) Educate yourself about how bad things are and quit navel-gazing. We lost our democracy because we did not have the political will to stop the erosion while it was happening. As a football coach once said when things were going wrong on the field, “We can’t correct a problem until we know what the problem is first.” My book, *America Abandoned*, explains what transpired on the political field. It also provides specific Stand Up Activities at the end of each chapter to begin recapturing what we have already lost.

As Paul Krugman wrote in his article, “How Republics End: Ominous Parallels to Ancient World”:

*One thing all of this makes clear is that the sickness of U.S. politics didn’t begin with Donald Trump, any more that the sickness of the Roman Republic began with Caesar. The erosion of democratic foundations has been underway for decades and there’s no guarantee that we will ever be able to recover.*

*But if there is any hope of redemption, it will have to begin with a clear recognition of how bad things are. U.S. democracy is very much on the edge.*

5) Seriously ask yourself, do you have the political will to bring democracy back from the edge? If the answer is yes, then exercise your ***bold citizenship***. It will be worth every minute of your time to you and your country.

***“Every time you are tempted to react in the same old way, ask if you want to be a prisoner of the past or a pioneer of the future.”—Deepak Chopra***