

“No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime.”—Kofi Annan

Finding Hope in the Power of Civics

Every day across Connecticut, there are people of all backgrounds who make the choice to build a civic life. Working professionals, grandparents, students, retirees, and more are signing up to be poll workers. Volunteers and community organizations are hosting voter registration drives. Residents continue to show up to local town meetings, testifying before the General Assembly, and volunteering in their communities.

Their dedication and commitment to serving their communities is laudable. From the intrepid citizens who braved perilous road conditions during a blizzard—hitching rides on a Public Works snowplow to open the polls in their community—to the poll workers who toiled through heat waves, their perseverance attests to unwavering allegiance to their civic duty.

Yet, for everyone who is an active civic participant, there are too many more who are not. In Connecticut, voter participation has been anemic; in our 2023 municipal election, 34% of the electorate came out to the polls, and in our 2022 state election, just over half of registered voters turned out.

Often, there is sentiment that one’s individual vote does not matter. But the collective power of each individual vote has influence, and there’s proof of one vote deciding an election. In 2022, a state representative won by one single vote. Indeed, voters have the power to influence the outcome of an election.

The strength of our representative democracy lies in the knowledge and active participation of its citizens, and there is an opportunity to shift our citizenry’s thinking. An informed citizen is more likely to participate in civic affairs, vote in elections, and contribute to the collective well-being of their community. Current civic efforts by some offer a glimmer of hope for our future.

That is the true Power of Civics, and this is where our hope lies.

Helping the public understand how to use the great power they hold will empower them to engage in their communities, in Connecticut and in the country. Most people want to be civically engaged, but they don’t know where to start.

To solve that problem, our office created a civics toolkit—The Power of Civics (PowerofCivics.ct.gov)—that provides dozens of action items to get people started on their civic journey. No matter one’s age, background, or level of experience, anyone can do something to be engaged. Collectively, small actions lead to big changes.

To encourage citizens to continue their engagement work, our office has found ways to recognize and celebrate their efforts. With the Registrars of Voters, our office organizes Poll Worker Appreciation events to celebrate the

hundreds of Connecticut citizens who serve as poll workers, the backbone of elections administration. They rise early to open polling locations, ensure our elections run safely and smoothly, and then stay late to count every last vote.

Instilling pride in voting is the goal of The Democracy Cup, a program that recognizes four Connecticut towns of different sizes with the highest voter turnout. Our office awards a trophy to each of the towns, sometimes kept on display in town halls as a physical reminder to voters of the collective impact of their individual actions.

As part of youth civic education, our office works on the Red, White & Blue Schools program in partnership with the Connecticut Department of Education and the Connecticut Democracy Center in Residence at Connecticut's Old State House. This program annually recognizes a school for its students' civic engagement project. This year, the Cornwall Consolidated Schools was recognized as the "Outstanding Red, White & Blue School," for its 7th grade project focused on bringing attention to the challenges people with disabilities often face.

To elevate the civic engagement conversation with young voters and build the future ranks of poll workers, the Next Gen Elections program was launched this year by securing a grant from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission (EAC). This program recruits and trains college students to be poll workers at any level, including at the highest position, moderator. The response was overwhelming, easily filling the 40 positions available for 2024. In 2025, 20 more will be added. THIS is the next generation of civic reformers.

Each of these programs create opportunities to build a more civically engaged citizenry, which will build an even stronger democracy for our state and country. Everyone has a role to play.

The Power of Civics is in your hands, Connecticut. The question is, will you use it?

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephanie Thomas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Stephanie Thomas
Secretary of the State



Secretary Stephanie Thomas (center) poses with Danbury Mayor Roberto Alves (center, holding trophy) and members of the Danbury Registrars of Voters' and Town Clerks' offices after receiving the 2023 Municipal Democracy Cup.



Participants in the inaugural cohort of the Next Gen Elections program pose during their Moderator Certification training.



Secretary Stephanie Thomas (center) poses with poll workers at a Poll Worker Appreciation Day in Columbia.



Secretary Stephanie Thomas (second from back-right) poses with faculty and students from Cornwall Consolidated School, winners of the 2024 Red, White, & Blue Schools "Outstanding School" recognition.