

Michael Poliakoff ([00:11](#)):

Welcome to Higher Ed Now. I'm Michael Poliakoff, the president of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni. And today we have the great privilege of talking with Dr. Richard Haass. Dr. Haass had the most distinguished career in government. I think we could start by noting how remarkably bipartisan his service to the nation has been. He was in the State Department under Presidents George W. Bush and Ronald Reagan, at the White House under George HW Bush and at the Pentagon under Jimmy Carter.

([00:49](#)):

He was a key figure in the negotiations over Cyprus, Northern Ireland's peace process. And after September 11th, was the United States Coordinator for the future of Afghanistan. It is a career that has been dedicated to the service of our nation. He's the president emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations and now senior counselor at Centerview Partners, an international investment banking advisory firm. He's the author of 14 books on American foreign policy, a book on management, and one that we'll be talking about, particularly today on American democracy, *The Bill of Obligations: The Ten Habits of Good Citizens*. He's a Rhodes Scholar and he holds a degree from Oberlin College and a master's and doctorate of philosophy from Oxford University.

([01:45](#)):

So Dr. Haass, thank you so very much for taking the time in a very, very busy, busy life to be with us. And I should mention one of the things that I'm particularly grateful for is that you've agreed to serve on ACTA's National Commission on American History and Civic Education, something that actually grows right out of... I believe it's chapter nine of your book, the *Bill of Obligations*. And I particularly want to talk with you today about both the crisis in America of a weakening understanding of democracy and what we as educators need to do to turn that around, so welcome.

Richard Haass ([02:26](#)):

Good to be with you, Michael. Thank you for all the work you do. Thank you for inviting me on your podcast. I look forward to the conversation.

Michael Poliakoff ([02:32](#)):

We're really honored to have you. I'm going to actually start with one of the very striking things that you discussed right at the beginning of your chapter on the obligation of civic education, which was to take us back to the Passover Seder, the Haggadah. And it made me think of that powerful line towards the beginning of the Seder. In every generation, a person has to look upon himself, let's say herself as well, as if he or she came out of Egypt. And then of course, in the telling of the story, [inaudible 00:03:11], we were slaves to pharaoh in Egypt and we're actually told to use our imagination, that if the holy one, HaKadosh Baruch Hu, had brought us out from Egypt and even we and our children and our children's children might still be slaves. It's a wake-up call that when we lose memory, we're dooming ourselves to a degeneration that I think we can say metaphorically is a kind of road to enslavement.

([03:43](#)):

So I wanted to ask you to muse a little bit about that. In our current situation when we're looking at things... I don't want to become partisan or political... But we're looking at things happening in our nation that suggest a real lack of commitment to the American story and to the American drive towards that more perfect union, sometimes flipping now to a Soviet poet, think of what Yevtushenko said, "Who never knew the price of happiness will not be happy, and the people who don't know the price of freedom and the ongoing struggle are not going to respect it." So I want to stop nattering on and get your thoughts and then we'll turn to some of the specifics about what we might need to do on this commission.

Richard Haass ([04:32](#)):

Sure. The reason the Passover holiday is such a good parallel is that for much of their history, Jews did not have access to synagogues or temples, places of worship. They were often persecuted. They couldn't take for granted that Jewish identity, much less observance would continue. What to me is so powerful and wonderful about the Passover holiday is... Why it mostly takes place in the home around a dinner table. And as you know, everything is done in a prescribed order. Everything has symbolism to it. It's a teaching experience. What Passover is... It's not a classroom, it's the dining room. But the dining room is turned into a classroom. We don't take for granted that anyone around the table is aware of his or her tradition, the backstory, their connection to events of just over 3000 years ago and why those events remain relevant.

(05:23):

So to me, it's the most basic of holiday because it doesn't assume, but rather it teaches. It poses questions. It provides answers. It's participatory. And to me, it's one of the reasons that Jews, despite being a time scattered in diasporas, being persecuted and so forth, have persevered and their identity has been sustained and maintained.

(05:51):

So now let me connect this to the American experience. We're not talking about thousands of years. We're talking about essentially two and a half centuries. We're about a year away from the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, which by the way in democracy terms is, shall we say, very long. We are the world's oldest functioning democracy. And the lesson I take is direct that we shouldn't assume that anyone is born with an awareness of why democracy is valuable, why people fought for it, what it takes to succeed, what it requires of its citizens, what it provides to its citizens. So we need a teaching experience if our democracy is going to survive or thrive, and that's what motivated me to write this.

(06:40):

It's what motivates me to devote a good chunk of my time is that we're not doing a very good job in this country transmitting the essence of democracy. We're not making the case for it. And not surprising, Michael, think about it. Anyone who's fairly young, I'll put that in the under 40 category, even under 45. In their life, they've known 9/11. They've known the 2007, 08 mortgage financial crisis. They've known COVID. They've known wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. They've known the recent inflation. They've known the border crisis. They've known January 6th. It's a pretty long list. They could be forgiven for asking themselves, "What's so good about democracy?" Or to put it bluntly, "I've seen what American democracy has done to me. I don't see what it has done for me," and as a result, it shouldn't surprise you or me or anybody that American democracy is in many cases not held in high regard by younger generations. And that American democracy more broadly is fraying at the edges.

(07:40):

The fabric of American democracy is not what it needs to be. Let's just be blunt for lots of reasons. That's why it's good we're having this conversation. That's why it's good you've got your commission. The main lesson I draw on this is we can't take it for granted any more than going back to the Jewish parallel. Jews can't take for granted the continuation of their religion. So we need to make the case for it. We've got to consciously, intentionally teach civics. That's the best way I know. It's not the only way, but it's the best single way I know to increase the odds that democracy in this country, not just survives, but hopefully does more than survive.

Michael Poliakoff (08:15):

You had mentioned in your book that the remedy is not likely to come from within without some outside pressure and remarkably, we've seen some state legislatures really stepping up to the plate. REACH Act in South Carolina. There's a parallel that's now in the North Carolina legislature. Ohio and Senate Bill 1 just put through a very strong requirement, and these are fairly prescriptive ones. They actually lay out

Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Federalist Papers and Emancipation Proclamation. This seems absolutely wholesome, but we've also got all of those private universities that are preparing teachers, that are purportedly preparing citizens. So we've got a lot more work to do on making sure that this becomes something that a school would be ashamed not to do.

Richard Haass ([09:12](#)):

You're a bit more glass half full than I am. I think the glass is half empty. I welcome the fact that several states are now writing laws that require civics, but this is not optimal. The idea that someone would learn a different civics curriculum in Ohio than Indiana, than Florida, than New York, than California in some ways defeats the purpose. Ideally there would be a national civics curriculum. Since the articles of Confederation, the 13 original states, they had sovereignty.

([09:42](#)):

One of the great changes from the articles of Confederation to the Constitution is state's no longer a sovereign. The federal government of the United States of America is sovereign. So ideally we would just have one civics course that teaches, if you will, the American collective experience. That politically is, unfortunately, beyond our reach. Washington is unable to accomplish much these days and this is another what the French would say, a "mutilé de guerre."

([10:05](#)):

It's second best to have the states do it, but second best is better than nothing. The other challenge is the unevenness of what's taught. It's one thing to call for civics. It's one thing to say, "We're going to mandate it," but what is the content? And that can involve some, shall we say, rather big struggles or fights or whatever word you want to use. It's one thing to agree in principle, something very else to agree in practice. So I'd still like there to be national standards that then states can tweak or adapt as they adopt those standards. And for high schools, for private and public schools, charter schools, what have you, all of them ought to be doing this. Think about it. The only thing everyone pretty much has to do is go to school until he or she's 16. So we've got to get to Americans before they're 16, certainly before they graduate high school.

([10:54](#)):

And by the way, when they graduate high school, that's also when they arrive at the age of voting. Most people who graduate high school are teen or about to turn 18. They've got to be, I think, up to speed, shall we say. And then yeah, college is another opportunity. And I lost count. 4,000 or so colleges, universities of one sort or another. Now one of the strengths of the American college university system is for the most part it's decentralized. Not only is it not national, it's not, with very few exceptions, part of state systems. But that's also a potential weakness because it's unevenness. And the adoption process is more difficult.

([11:31](#)):

For a state to mandate that every high school or elementary school in the state do X, Y, Z, okay, well then all the schools in that state have to do X, Y, Z. We don't have that capacity or power for better and for worse when it comes to higher education in this country. You've got to do it mostly by onesies. So that's where we are. Most schools offer it but don't require it. Let me just be clear. Big difference between offering and requiring. Very few schools of core curricula. Many schools have distribution requirements, but you might have 80 or 100 courses from which you choose six to fulfill this or that requirement. So we shouldn't get ourselves. We are not close to where we need to get when it comes to civics education in this country.

Michael Poliakoff ([12:11](#)):

I couldn't agree more. And of course how we get there is every bit as crucial as what we're going to put in it. I like the idea personally that we don't try to prescribe so closely that we impede the creativity and the

genius of the instructor, particularly at the higher education level. But on the other hand, that we're not encouraging anything goes. I sometimes look at the underbelly of higher education and see what passes for a distribution requirement in American life or American experience. And it can be anything from blues to jazz dancing to films. And that, of course, is a disgrace. Nothing wrong with these things as electives, but to pretend that that will prepare a person for citizenship is just fantastical.

Richard Haass (13:05):

No, you're 100% right. And you also see in a lot of civics courses, it's community service is a big part of it. And again, don't get me wrong, all in favor of community service in principle, but that's not a substitute for becoming familiar with the Constitution or the Declaration of Independence or Federalist Papers or some critical Supreme Court decisions or some central pivotal moments in American history. So there's a lack at times of consistency and certainly a lack of standards in what it is we do teach.

Michael Poliakoff (13:37):

I'm more than glass half full on what some of the states are doing. In Tennessee is a bill that's pending that even includes some basic understanding of economics and markets along with the core documents of American history. The Ohio bill actually includes readings from Adam Smith and one of my colleagues was saying, "Why on earth?" And I said, "Because it's foundational for understanding free markets."

Richard Haass (14:08):

I'm sorry to interrupt. I love that idea and I would extend it to a few other areas, and this is part of the conversation we need to have. One is in order to be an informed citizen, in order to be an active citizen, an interesting question is what is the minimal or requisite background you need? So if you're going to be passing some judgments about economic policy or whatever, then yes, you need to have a degree of what you might call economic literacy. You certainly need to have a degree of information literacy. By that I mean you've got to be able to navigate the information ecosystem and know where to get authoritative, accurate information, how to discern or discriminate between facts and opinions and so forth. So we've got to teach information literacy.

(14:48):

Given my background, you won't be shocked to hear that I believe there needs to be a degree of global literacy, that the United States is 340 million people out of a world of 8, 9 billion or whatever percentage of global GDP we are this week. 75 or 80% of it takes place outside the United States. There's 190 plus other countries in the United Nations, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Part of the conversation, it's got to focus on things American, if you will, but it's got to go beyond that. I totally welcome the idea that there's an economic dimension to this. I think that's totally warranted.

Michael Poliakoff (15:25):

Crucial part of our history. This nation's commerce and its entrepreneurship that's kind of baked into our founding has had an enormous effect on our global strategy as well. And so we can do a lot, I believe, in one semester if it's well-designed. I guess I have to be optimistic since I started with the Haggadah, I'll give a nod to St. Paul, "Faith, hope and love." To hang on to that hope that we can, basically by a process of both shame and pride, get more participation. That when we get more states whose legislatures are basically saying, "Look, we're paying money for these universities and we're not interfering in their academic freedom, but we are saying that it's not okay for students to leave without the kind of basic civic knowledge that equips them for what President Reagan called informed patriotism, that they will not be the sort of people who will as so many answered on a survey that Quinnipiac did and which we repeated, 'Well, if this nation were invaded by Russia, we would just leave.'"

(16:40):

I find that one of the most horrifying findings ever, that the younger generation, unlike the older generation... We can see this in age bands, gave a pretty chilling answer right after the invasion of Ukraine. What would happen if this were America being invaded? And I see all of these things connecting. So for legislatures to be saying, "We see this as a crisis and we're going to do what we can by prescribing at least the basics of knowledge of America and its founding principles," this strikes me as good and now onto the privates.

Richard Haass ([17:21](#)):

No, look, it's good in principle. The devil's in the details. You've also got to build capacity to do it. When I headed the Council on Foreign Relations for two decades, we developed an enormous program in teaching Americans in elementary schools, high schools, colleges and universities about the world. What we found in many instances, particularly in public schools, was teacher training was inadequate to the task. Teachers are clearly... An awful lot being asked of them, and in many cases they're not prepared to take it all on. So you've got to do a lot. You can't just mandate something.

([17:56](#)):

Going back to another teaching experience I had when I taught at the Kennedy School, we used to teach that 98 or 99% of life was implementation. So even if we can agree on the design mandates, we then have to make it happen. So a lot of work will have to go into the quality of the teaching materials, their accessibility for teachers.

([18:16](#)):

This is a big lift, and again, don't get me wrong, I'm not pessimistic. But I think this is an important lift but also a big lift. The good news is I think the mindset is moving in this direction. When I talk about this as I travel around the country, Michael, I encounter more and more head nodding and people go, "You're right. We've got to do this." So I think in principle, again, I emphasize in principle, I think there's a receptivity to what you and I are talking about and the challenge for us and others is to translate that into, again, the adoption of intelligent mandates and then the ability to implement the mandates at whatever academic level.

Michael Poliakoff ([18:50](#)):

And of course we have the almost completely underused boards of trustees, boards of regents, visitors whose responsibility it really is to ensure that each institution of higher learning will have such requirements. And I'm rather hoping that we can, again, through pride and shame, get more of them to say, "Sorry, faculty, this thing called shared governance means shared and it means that we actually have governance and we are now saying that you all have to design solid foundational courses and require them of everybody."

Richard Haass ([19:33](#)):

100%. Schools have got to do it. Often in my experience, faculty resists core courses, required courses. My view is too bad. That has to be made clear. The other party, and this is parents. In many cases, parents are paying the tab for their son's or daughter's education. They're consumers. Think of it as a consumer. And when you buy a car or you buy any other appliance, you are demanded for what it is you get for your hard-earned money. We ought to be no less demanding as to what our kids are required to learn on campus. And by the way, students for the most part, with all due respect... I remember myself at that age, barely. I didn't know what I needed to learn. So I think students should have a say in their education, but I do not think they ought to be in control of it.

([20:22](#)):



I believe that parents ought to be a voice here and obviously as you say, the boards... The administration and the boards ought to step up to their responsibilities here. And by the way, universities ought not to be afraid of saying, "We will require this. We will do this. This may not be for you. This may not be for everybody." Well, so be it. The military academies do quite well even though they define themselves in a very rigorous way. And by the way, they tend to do better at what we're talking about than most of their civilian counterparts.

(20:54):

But that's a good example of schools that define their mission, that define their experience. They say, "We're not for everybody, but if you come here, this is what you've got to expect." University of Chicago has been more clear than some places. There was a time, no longer, Columbia was. But my point is simply the goal ought not to be uniformity. Schools ought to put their imprint on it, given their own traditions, faculty, what have you. The imprint ought to be within certain bounds. We ought to have a sense that everybody essentially will get this and whatever percent of it is. And then yes, there's percent on the side that schools can innovate. They can change things given their own traditions, their own this or that. We need, if you will, them to step up.

(21:40):

And I actually don't mind the kind of marketplace and competition. I love the idea that certain schools are known, like of Great Books schools, St. Johns, you would have schools that will say, "Hey, we've got a core education. 25% of your time here, this is what you're going to do and we're going to make sure when you graduate, you are literate in American civics and politics and basic economics and computer stuff, in geography or international relations and so forth. Come here and we guarantee that when you leave here, you'll have this under your belt." My own hunch is they'll do pretty well if they were to do that. A lot of parents are going to say, "That sounds good. That sounds like I'm going to get something valuable for my money," but I'd like to create a kind of race to the top among American colleges and universities.

Michael Poliakoff (22:27):

That's a wonderful phrase. We have to capture that. Actually at some point I want to talk a little bit about our wish list for what would be in, if not all, in most of these courses. When you mentioned Harvard, it made me think how sad it is... The Red Book of 1945, of course in the shadow of the second World War, really understood the obligation of Harvard to have that signature core course in Western values. I know Western values has been for a while a rather toxic concept. We've got to now detoxify it, get people to recognize that these are great contributions to world civilization, but look at Harvard now. What passes for their distribution requirement could be almost anything that-

Richard Haass (23:15):

Well, it's not just Harvard. Most of the Ivy League... Look at Brown. It's an unstructured education. There's quality offerings on these campuses from Harvard to Brown to any of them, but I do think they do themselves and more important, their students no favor when they are not being more demanding in what they require. Part of running a university is you're making a statement, "This is what we think you need to understand, to know, in order to be ready to take your place in society," be it in the political sense, the economic sense, the informational sense, the technology sense, what have you. And you won't get a one size fits all answer to that. You ought not to.

(23:58):

But every school ought to be doing that. I don't understand the reticence of schools. It's too 60s-ish for me. Let the faculty decide what they want to teach. Let the students decide what they want to learn. Yes, there's an element of choice. I get it. But like everything else, choice needs to be bounded and institutions, I would argue, need to be willing to define themselves and be prepared for the fact that it won't be for everybody, but the good news, it will be for somebody.

Michael Poliakoff ([24:22](#)):

We have a grave misunderstanding in American higher education about what shared governance really is. The fact that the core functions and quality measures have been turned over almost entirely to faculty control is not shared governance. And what's happened is that in many places, Harvard's a good example of that, the faculty control has created an echo chamber in which you simply don't get any voices that dissent against its own very progressive orthodoxy.

Richard Haass ([24:59](#)):

You've got progressive orthodoxy. You've also got, and particularly in elite universities, you've got faculty that is much more concerned with its own research than with teaching. Tenure decisions tend not to be made on teaching or classroom abilities. Again, you're not going to get an argument from me on what you're saying. Again, faculty ought to have a voice. They're an important constituency along with students, obviously along with administrators, along with alumni, along obviously with the board of education, but I do not believe in faculty run institutions, faculty voice, absolutely. But faculty primacy, I would say not.

Michael Poliakoff ([25:37](#)):

We can say where it has gotten us in the institutes in which it has really been the dominant operating procedure. I must have mentioned to you at some point when we were talking about the commission, we are creating a volume, an anthology called What Every College Student Should Know about American History and Government, along with a white paper that we're going to release in 2026 with a lot of firepower because we want parents, policymakers, legislators to take to heart first of all, the extent of the crisis, what really should be in a core college course that's required, and finally, how do we get it done? That'll be our contribution in 2026.

([26:24](#)):

In addition to a volume that will both inspire and provide some guidance for the people who will be creating these courses, and I'm delighted at the topics that are emerging. Jane Calvert, the Dickinson scholar, is going to be talking about the intersection of American religion in history, and Louise Mirrer who will chair the commission, is going to talk about the importance of realia, the artifacts, the things that really connect us to what actually happened. I'm channeling Leopold von Ranke there, not imagination but the actuality. And Roosevelt Montás is going to be talking about primary documents and H.R. McMaster on the role of the citizen soldier, the evolving concept of the military, and Anne Neal about the central importance of George Washington and Bill McClay on the moral formation of citizens. I wanted to turn now to our rather open-ended discussion of if we had it all our way, what would be in that course? What would we recommend that every college student should have?

Richard Haass ([27:43](#)):

I'm thinking a lot about it because I'm working on a similar project myself and some of it we've already discussed. There's foundational documents, which I would include everything from the Declaration, possibly the Articles of Confederation, just for contrast, the Constitution. I think it's important to get court decisions and dissents. I found in the writing of the Bill of Obligations, the value of certain inaugural speeches and also some farewell addresses I found to be just incredibly important. You mentioned the economics component potentially. I mentioned geography and international relations, an element there. I think information literacy has to be central since we live in an age in which people are bombarded not just with misinformation, but misinformation and how to navigate that complexity. I think, Michael, all that's got to be in it. I would say probably two other things.

([28:39](#)):

One is I want people to have an understanding of American society and there's an element there, almost the analog to the world in the world you'd want to know, "Okay, you got this many countries and these are the patterns out there and these are some of the principle institutions and so forth." I'd want people to understand American society, the demography of it, things about religion, things about race, things about age, things about wealth. I think Americans should have a basic understanding of what the United States is at this period in its history and how it got here, how it's changed and so forth.

(29:12):

And I think the most controversial part of this will be history. And it will be what to teach and how to teach it. My guess is that's where a lot of these things come a cropper. Turns out that history is wildly controversial. I know this because one of my many hats back when I was the US envoy and then I was the international mediator brought in to Northern Ireland, and I was trying to get people to deal with their own controversial history. They had three decades of violence from roughly the late '60s to the late '90s known as the Troubles.

(29:44):

A lot of this was obviously Catholic against Protestant, one tradition against another. What I wanted to do was see if we couldn't come to terms with the history, not to agree on it, at least to be aware of it. It turned out to be a bridge too far. But I think we need to try to do some of that in our own country. What are the critical historical events that every American needs to know? What do you need to know about the Civil War and so forth. Now, what events about the depression, about other such things? And then you'd say, "Okay, there might be competing interpretation." So I don't think we would want to try to impose a single viewpoint, a single perspective. I think that would be a mistake and you'd never get it approved.

(30:23):

What I do think you could try to do is say, "Here's what happened. Here's almost timeline of American history. Here are the 20 most important phases, events," however you want to do it and, "Here's some readings that capture the competing schools of thought as to why this happened, what were the implications and so forth and so on." And I think that both increases your chances of getting adopted because you can't be accused of trying to impose one view of history on students. And second of all, you educate students because they got to get used to the idea that they're living in a world.

(30:55):

There's things called facts, but there's also things called analyses. There's things called judgment. There's things called opinions and so forth. They should be exposed to competing analyses and opinions based upon a similar set of facts. I think that would be healthy for them. But I do think out of everything you and I could talk about, the single most important, but probably most difficult part of concocting of civics curriculum, and there's possibly other aspects as well, there could be, for example, a public service aspect, is going to be the history component.

Michael Poliakoff (31:27):

You're so right that tethering these things, these controversial moments to documents is a really strong way of making sure that we're presenting ourselves and walking the walk of objectivity as we look at these moments in our history that are indeed contested, following a model in which we have the core documents and sometimes documents that give conflicting visions, Federalists and anti-Federalists to start with.

Richard Haass (32:03):

100%. But I think that it's going to be complicated to decide what to teach in some cases and obviously how to teach it. And at the end of the day, you're not going to get consensus that's going to cover the entire country. You may or may not get consensus in various states or schools, but again, what I would



hope to do is you could get consensus on a large amount of it, percentage of it if you will, and then where you can't get consensus, you expose students to a range of things. That's not the worst of all outcomes.

Michael Poliakoff ([32:32](#)):

And certainly for higher education, absolutely crucial. I am myself absolutely thrilled that we're going to have this opportunity and I think we can do something good for the nation. Looking at 4,000 schools, I'll be happy if a few hundred, the end of this process in 2026, make the resolution another, few hundred more that we can't continue to neglect the training of our future citizens and hope that that snowball going down the hill will gradually pick up more and more snow and more and more momentum. I like to think in my most wildly hopeful moments that we'll see a day in our own lifetime when a college or university would be ashamed not to have such a signature required course.

Richard Haass ([33:21](#)):

I agree with you. At a minimum, it would be nice to make sure that every school would be able to offer it as a first step. Because I would bet that some schools don't even offer it, so it'd be nice to make sure that it's offered everywhere. And yeah, I agree 100% to make sure that what is offered is quality, that we think it checks the boxes it needs to. And yes, to increase the number of schools that would require as a condition for graduation, I think would be a fantastic trend to set in motions. If you all can do that, it would be a great mitzvah, as we say in the American classroom.

Michael Poliakoff ([33:54](#)):

Well, yes, mitzvah aleinu, it's a mitzvah for all of us. We can do this for the nation. This is one of the ways that we can do better. You close that wonderful book of yours, the Bill of Obligations, with admonition that we get the government that we deserve because politics is ultimately downstream from our culture.

Richard Haass ([34:16](#)):

For better and for worse it's, "We the People." But I think we increase the odds we'll get the government we need if we, among other things, improve civic education. So this is a long-term investment. I think it's also important to be realistic here. This is not going to affect what's taking place on the streets of California and other cities right now. It's not going to affect what happens in the midterms or in three years. This is a generational thing. We can keep getting biblical about it from generation to generation, [inaudible 00:34:45], but that's what we're talking about. But you've got to start somewhere and some time. And this doesn't rule out doing other things that are more immediate. But this to me is part of the menu of options. And some are immediate, some are midterm, some are long-term. This is a long-term investment in us, and I think it'll take some time to generate the intellectual material and then time to train up teachers, time to build support for it in universities and schools and all that. But got to start sometime. Got to start somewhere. So good for you all.

Michael Poliakoff ([35:14](#)):

We will have our hearts and minds and backs in this. I think back to President Reagan's farewell address when he challenged the youth at the dinner table to really hold their elders accountable if they're not actively engaged in the American story.

Richard Haass ([35:32](#)):

It's such a great line, and he talks about the dinner table being so important, but I think part of my takeaway from that and things have deteriorated since then is Reagan gave that speech. It's now some time ago you think about it, that speech was given, what? My date's right... January '89. Okay, so that's 35

years ago, plus or minus. And I think we have to face the reality that many parents, either because of a lack of education or they're busy with multiple jobs or lots of times you only have one parent or whatever, aren't in a position to do this. So I think part of the reason what we're talking about here today is so important about civics in schools, it's just not realistic to depend on the dining room, if you will, as the answer. Might be part of the answer in some houses, but in many houses it won't be. And that's why, again, you can't control what goes on in the home, but you can mandate what happens in the educational system, certainly in the public educational system. And that's why, again, I think what you're doing is important.

Michael Poliakoff ([36:32](#)):

We will do it with all of our heart and energy, and I'm so very, very grateful that you're helping us, that you're devoting time to this commission.

Richard Haass ([36:41](#)):

Happy to. Can you do one thing for me in return? When you do the introduction, you can add after all those nice things you said about me, most of which are true, you can plug my weekly newsletter, Home & Away. Because I would like anybody who's listening to this to try reading it. Hopefully they would find it of value.

Michael Poliakoff ([36:57](#)):

Well, having just read your June 6th edition, can do that with great, great commitment. I thought it was beautifully written. Words of warning gracefully given and the kinds of wake up calls that we need. We are in a time and place in history where do we the people have to be alert and we have to be committed and we have to be active. And I appreciate the candor with which you write those things.

Richard Haass ([37:30](#)):

Amen to that. Thank you, sir.

Michael Poliakoff ([37:32](#)):

Thank you for being with us and hope we'll meet either on Zoom or in person on October 3, but if not, we will definitely be staying in touch and my colleagues and I are very, very grateful for all that you're doing to help us.

Richard Haass ([37:46](#)):

Thank you, Michael. Good conversation.

Doug Sprei ([38:06](#)):

Higher Ed Now is a production of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni in Washington DC. To learn more about our work in the pivotal issues of higher education, visit [goacta.org](http://goacta.org) or you can email us at [info@goacta.org](mailto:info@goacta.org). If you enjoy Higher Ed Now, you can subscribe and leave us a review at Apple Podcasts or Spotify. I'm Doug Sprei. Thanks for listening. Stay safe. Take care of yourselves. And we'll share more episodes with you soon.