



Helping Students Become Better Citizens

by Amy K. Frantz

For eight years, Public Interest Institute has published the *IOWA CIVICS PROJECT*, a 12-unit curriculum exploring the historical development of government in Iowa; the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of Iowa's state government; county and city government; civil and criminal justice; school administration; state government finances; and the rights and responsibilities of citizens.

For this school year, Institute President Dr. Don Racheter has authored an update of the project. Now titled *IOWA GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS*, the textbook expands on the existing topics from the *IOWA CIVICS PROJECT* and adds additional material covering areas of interest to government-class teachers and students. Each chapter includes a list of Useful Websites, a Vocabulary list, a Review Quiz, and Suggestions for Additional Activities.

Chapter One: *Iowa's Founding*, details the history of our state, from the first European claims on the mainland of North America to Iowa's admission to the Union as the 29th state, and the development of the Constitution of the State of Iowa. This chapter also gives an overview of state, county, and city government and the checks and balances established to help guard against government not serving "the interests of the customer."

The next three chapters describe the Legislative, Executive, and Judicial branches of Iowa government. Each chapter begins with a section on the Constitutional Authority granted to each branch. In *The Iowa Legislative Branch*, students will learn about the makeup of the members of the Legislature, how an idea evolves into a state law, and the role staff plays in that process. *The Iowa Executive Branch* details the powers granted to the Governor and describes the other executive branch officers and agencies. *The Iowa Judicial Branch* describes the state's court system and the aspects of criminal and civil cases.

Chapter Five describes the *Authorities, Boards, Commissions, Councils, and Districts* that have been created. While these various groups enable citizens to provide input and expertise into state public policy decisions, they also allow unelected individuals, who are not directly accountable to voters, to make rules regulating the activities of the citizens of the state.

Local Governments, the topic of Chapter Six, include counties, cities and towns, and townships. This chapter describes the different forms and officers of city and county governments, the services provided by local governments, and how those services are funded. Local governments do provide more personalized attention than state or national governments. However, in modern times, combining some cities and/or counties would be more efficient, although this is unlikely to occur under the current system.

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600 North Jackson Street

Mt. Pleasant, Iowa 52641-1328

Phone: 319-385-3462 Fax: 319-385-3799

E-Mail: public.interest.institute@limitedgovernment.org Website: www.limitedgovernment.org

Education is the title of Chapter Seven, a subject likely to be of particular interest to teachers and students in government classes, as well as to all Iowans, because we “spend more on education each year than on all the other items funded by government combined.” In this chapter, students will learn about the 395 local school boards, the State Board of Education, and the Board of Regents that govern the different levels of education in the state. Private K-12 schools, private colleges, and homeschooling are also included in this chapter.

Chapters on *Political Parties*, *Interest Groups*, and *The Mass Media* address these groups that, while not directly authorized or established in the U.S. or State Constitutions, have become an integral part of political life in Iowa. *Political Parties* outlines the general functions, organizations, and activities of political parties, and provides specific information on the Democrat, Republican, and minor parties that operate in the state. The positive and negative features of *Interest Groups* are highlighted in that chapter, along with a discussion of the democratic paradox — the problem of the “organized minority taking advantage of the unorganized majority.” Today, the mass media include traditional formats such as newspapers and television and radio programs, as well as newer formats such as Internet websites and web logs or “blogs.” The mass media play a role in politics and government by keeping citizens informed, serving as a “watchdog” on politicians and officials, and assisting in the process of political socialization. However, one must be aware of the potential for bias in their presentation.

Chapter Eleven: *Voting and Elections* describes the process and procedures of voting and elections, as well as concepts that may impact this process, such as gerrymandering and incumbency. This chapter also includes a unique proposal, “Racheter’s Renewal and Removal Reform,” to address the problem of individuals forgetting to re-register when they move.

Finally, Chapter Twelve: *Citizenship*, brings together all of the previous chapters, and shares with students the importance of being informed about and participating in government and politics. Being a citizen of America and of Iowa is a privilege; we are guaranteed certain rights, but we must fulfill our responsibilities as citizens if we are to keep them.

Public Interest Institute will provide a copy of *IOWA GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS*, at no charge, for each student of any government teacher, any school (private or public), or any parent of homeschoolers in Iowa. If your local school is not using *IOWA GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS* in a government class, please encourage the teachers to consider using this book. If your local school is using these materials, we hope you will consider making a donation to help sponsor the distribution of *IOWA GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS* to the students.

Amy K. Frantz is a Research Analyst with Public Interest Institute.

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