

A Tale of Participatory Civics-SAMPLE ANSWERS

This story was told by former Florida Governor and U.S. Senator Bob Graham in his book America The Owner's Manual: You Can Fight City Hall- And Win

Our tale starts with cold, greasy pizza.

In 1974, I was the chairman of the Florida Senate Education Committee. In preparation for the upcoming spring legislative session, the committee held a series of hearings in public schools throughout the state to hear suggestions for bills we might consider. One such hearing was at Samuel W. Wolfson High School in Jacksonville.

Our practice was to reserve a period of time during each hearing for student comments. In most endeavors, consumers of goods or services know how well their needs are being met— and students are the primary consumers of public education.

On this morning, a group of students came to the microphone to tell the committee of a serious school problem and ask for our help. The concern was bad food in the Wolfson cafeteria.

The complaint didn't shock me. As I recalled, the food at Miami Senior High School, from which I had graduated almost twenty years earlier, wasn't the most appetizing. [...]

I asked if we were the first authority to whom they had taken their concerns. I was relieved to hear that we were the third. But I was distressed when I heard the answer to my next question: Which were the first and second?

The students had first gone to the Jacksonville mayor, who agreed with the students as to the quality of the food but told them it was out of his jurisdiction. Their second request went to the Duval County sheriff, who also sympathized but said that although the food was bad, it wasn't criminal. And as I had to inform the students, the Senate didn't control cafeteria menus either.

Questions

1. In trying to be informed and engaged citizens, what did these students do well?

They have passion for wanting to change something they perceive to be an issue; they are working together; they came to a civic meeting to speak; they are engaging with elected officials; they haven't given up even though met with some roadblocks

2. In trying to be informed and engaged citizens, what could these students have done differently?

They are bringing their concerns to the wrong government officials in terms of powers/responsibilities (shows possible lack of civic knowledge); they may not have a researched solution to present/propose