

# Unit 6 Text 1; Citizenship Duties and Responsibilities

SSCG7 The student will describe how thoughtful and effective participation in civic life is characterized by obeying the law, paying taxes, serving on a jury, participating in the political process, performing public service, registering for military duty, being informed about current issues, and respecting differing opinions.

## Citizenship Defined

The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment states that anyone who is born or naturalized is a citizen of the United States and States in which they reside. A person is born by the Law of Blood (**jus sanguinis**) when they are born to parents who are citizens of the United States. A person who is born by the Law of Soil (**jus soli**) when they are born in the United States, **Naturalization** is the process detailed by Congress whereby a person who is not born of blood or soil can become a citizen of the United States.

## Duties and Responsibilities of Citizens

The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment also guarantees citizens that their rights will be protected by and from both the states and the federal governments. But with these rights, also come duties and responsibilities for the citizen. **Duties** are those things a citizen must do. While **responsibilities** are those things a citizen should do.

## Duties of Citizens

It is the duty of all Citizen and others to **obey the law** or be prepared to suffer the consequences and punishments as dictated by the law. Punishments include a loss of **liberty**, the freedom to make individual decisions. Violators of the law are put in a jail and thereby denied the right to decide where to go and what you to do. In a free society this is the greatest punishment you can give someone. Punishments are applied to all the duties of the citizen.

Another duty of a citizen is to pay their taxes. A **tax** is the money that people and businesses pay to support the activities of government it is what funds the government and all the services it provides the citizen.

There are many taxes a citizen must pay that are enacted by all the levels of government. The biggest tax a citizen must pay is their **income tax** a tax put on all earnings of all the people and corporations. The income tax is directly taken from all paychecks. This is done to help the citizens, by not having to make them pay a huge amount on tax day. The Income Tax is due to be paid each year by April the 15<sup>th</sup>. A citizen can get an extension from that date, but any money owed will be paid plus interest. Taxes are what funds the government and all the services it provides the citizen.

Jury Duty is a third duty of the citizen. Our democracy calls for the right of the people to have a jury of their peers in any criminal case to enable this people are called from the usually the local property tax rolls or from the voter registration rolls. It is up to the courts decide whether you serve on a jury or not.

A final duty that affects only some people is to register for the military draft. The **draft** is the process by which people are selected and notified for conscription. **Conscription** is the compulsory enrollment and induction into the military service, the purpose of the registration is to have a ready list of names if Congress were to pass legislation to bring back the draft. Military registration is currently only for male citizens when they turn 18 years of age. If Congress where to pass a conscription laws, then whomever the legislation applied to must comply with the duty of military service.

## Responsibility

While there is no punishment if a person does not fulfill a responsibility, citizenship responsibilities are all things that in some way help the local community, state, and/or nation run more effectively and by be more responsible to the needs and wants of the people.

One way in which as citizens can meet their citizenship responsibility is by being politically active. As almost all elected officials come from one of the two political parties, participation by a citizens in actually joining their chosen **political party**, a group of people with broad political interest who organize to the nominate candidates for office, to win elections, for the purpose of controlling government and determine public policy, would have an effect on the types of candidates who the party chooses, and if their candidate is elected, an effect on the agenda the elected official would follow.

Another responsibility would go beyond merely joining a political party would be by running for a political office. By running for office and maybe serving as an elected official, a person may have a significant impact on their community. More people running for office would bring a diversity of backgrounds, ideas and goals, something that is currently lacking in small pool of political party members and smaller number candidates we currently have to choose from.

While a person may choose to not participate directly in the political process, that person should at least keep themselves informed about the issues facing the nation. When people vote they are making a political decisions. It is important that they make this decision based on real knowledge of issues. They should also keep those who are in office, aware of their opinions and beliefs of what government should be doing. This should be done through their right of ***petition***, letting officials of the government know your opinion about what the government is doing, or failing to do.

Respecting the rights of others is an important part of the responsibilities of the citizen. While the majority rules, the minority still has rights. If the majority doesn't respect the rights of all people, then it becomes an excuse by which ever group gets elected to use this power of the government to deny their opposition's rights.

If a person does not want to be politically active, there are many ways in which they can help the society and the community they in live in by performing a public service. Volunteering is a great way to help the community in which you live in. A person can take on the responsibility to help clean a public area or they can assist with people who are unable to help themselves. More people volunteer to help others and their communities than are hired by the government to provide services to the people.

Finally a person's most important responsibility is to go and ***vote***, which is a formal expression of an opinion or a preference to a question put before members of a society. Voting helps determine who makes the laws that all people must obey. It also keeps the political officials honest to the needs of the people as voting determines whether we give to give that person the power to make the rules that we must obey.