

## Basic Concepts of Democracy (from *Magruder's*, Chapter 1)

### 1. A recognition of the fundamental worth and dignity of each and every person.

- A. The worth and dignity of each individual must be recognized and respected by all other individuals, and by all of society, at all times.
- B. A various times, the welfare of one or a few individuals is subordinated to the interests of the many in the interests of social order and the common good.

### 2. A respect for the equality of all persons.

- A. Democracy does not promise **equality of condition** (all people have the same in talents or worldly goods, salaries, etc.), which is the promise of Communism.
- B. Democracy promises **equality of opportunity**--each should be able to develop herself as fully as he can or cares to.
- C. Democracy promises **equality before the law**. The legal systems of a democracy treat everyone the same--the same rules and procedures are applied to all.

### 3. A faith in majority rule and an insistence of minority rights.

- A. Democracy believes that the majority will be right more often than they are wrong, and can make political decisions better than one person or one small group can.
- B. Democracy is a trial and error process. Sometimes the decisions may not be the absolute best, but with majority support, the decisions will at least be satisfactory.
- C. A democracy respects minority rights by giving the minority the opportunity to become a majority through legal means and by making sure that the minority can openly voice its views.

### 4. An acceptance of the necessity of compromise.

- A. **Compromise is** the process of blending and adjusting and reconciling competing views and interests in order to find the position most acceptable to the largest number.
- B. Compromise is **important because...**
  - 1. If all individuals are equally important, with many different opinions and interests, we won't get anything done unless we compromise.
  - 2. Few public (political) questions have only two sides. Most can be answered in many different ways. Compromise allows us to find acceptable solutions to complex problems.

### 5. An insistence upon the widest possible area of individual freedom.

- A. No society can exist for long under **anarchy**, the total absence of government with no restraints on individuals at all. Anarchy usually is chaotic and leads ultimately to dictatorship.
- B. Democracy does insist that each individual must be as free to do as she pleases as the freedom of all will allow. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes commented on individual rights saying, "The right to swing my fist ends where the other man's nose begins."
- C. Achieving the right balance between the needs of society and the freedom of the individual is a major challenge of democracy.
- D. The two individual freedoms that are most sacred are **freedom of expression** and **freedom of thought**. These two freedoms must be jealously guarded for democracy to survive.