

My name is Peter Berkowitz and I am the Tad and Dianne Taube Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University. Hoover takes pride in its contribution to scholarly exploration of the challenges of American constitutional government. In the proposal to establish the Salmon P. Chase Center for Civics, Culture, and Society, I see a similar spirit of fresh and constructive engagement with liberal democracy in America.

The aim of liberal education is to form free citizens by cultivating free minds. Liberal education in America accomplishes its task by furnishing students' minds with knowledge of the great and influential ideas, landmark events, and major controversies that have shaped America and Western civilization as well as those that have shaped other nations and peoples. It also equips students with the dispositions and virtues to think for themselves. It empowers them to listen carefully, inquire systematically, reason independently, speak precisely, and judge fairly. Such an education is essential to the flourishing of liberal democracy in America.

Liberal education is especially at home in free societies. By transmitting knowledge of the principles of freedom and developing the habits of heart and mind that enable citizens to exercise their rights effectively and respect others' rights, liberal education performs vital civic services. It fortifies America's democratic way of life. It contributes to the preservation and improvement of constitutional self-government. And it promotes that toleration and mutual understanding essential to cooperating to advance the public interest.

The corruption of liberal education across the nation, therefore, poses a threat to liberal democracy in America. Many colleges and universities have abandoned the idea of a core curriculum – a set of seminal books, major ideas, and historical moments and eras with which educated citizens should be familiar – in favor of either grab bags of courses in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences or politicized seminar rooms and proselytizing lecture halls designed to inculcate a settled orthodoxy about domestic policy and America's role in the world. Colleges and universities routinely teach – both through express rules and regulations and unwritten norms of disapprobation and discipline – that the energetic exchange of opinions and the vigorous exploration of ideas must be circumscribed to accommodate partisan sensitivities and to advance institutionally favored political agendas. To regulate speech – and even to adjudicate grave accusations of sexual misconduct – colleges and universities often abrogate longstanding principles of due process and equality under law.

In the face of these baleful tendencies, The Chase Center for Civics, Culture, and Society promises to recover the venerable tradition of liberal education. According to the establishing legislation, the center's purpose "is to conduct teaching and research in the historical ideas, traditions, and texts that have shaped the American constitutional order and society." Since American civilization stems from Western civilization, the study of one is bound up with the study of the other. And since the American tradition and Western civilization put the question of freedom at the center of morality and politics, liberal education in America places America and the West at the core of its curriculum.

Following similar efforts—such as the School of Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership at Arizona State University, the American Civics Institute at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, the Civitas School of Civic Leadership at the University of Texas, and the Hamilton Center at the

University of Florida—the Chase Center promises to offer rigorous courses in literature, history, political philosophy, political economy, and religion. Although the natural sciences and social sciences are integral parts of a comprehensive liberal education, the humanities represent a sustaining source of free inquiry and thoughtful citizenship. The humanities are also the most neglected and imperiled part of higher education in America today.

In what would a renewal of liberal education consist? In the United States, liberal education naturally begins with the moral, political, economic, and legal principles on which constitutional government in America is based. It also presents the many dimensions of American history, not least the nation's struggles to live up to its founding principles. It broadens into study of the history of the West, giving pride of place to the defining debates of Western civilization – about reason and faith; the dignity of the individual and the imperatives of family, community, and political order; rights and responsibilities; freedom and authority; the virtues and the passions; conserving and reforming; unity and diversity; war and peace; and justice and its limits. Because of the variety of ways of being human and the openness of America and the West to the rest of the world, a liberal education must also introduce students to the ideas and formative experiences of other nations and peoples.

From the perspective of liberal education – and particularly when it comes to the enduring questions about ethics, politics, and the highest aims of a human life that have animated Western civilization and liberal democracy in America – it is not a professor's job to resolve abiding controversies or demand deference to authoritative opinions. Rather, the professor's responsibility is to ensure that students understand the relevant facts and the larger issues; grasp the logic and texture of the arguments on the various sides of the matter; and appreciate the attractions, strengths, and vulnerabilities of each of the major perspectives.

By serving as a bastion of liberty of thought and discussion, the Chase Center would create a community of students and professors devoted to systematic study of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. It would respect all students, faculty, and administrators as equal under the law. And, while appreciating the multiplicity of students' interests and providing ample opportunity to delve into specialized topics, the Chase Center would feature a core set of courses to provide a shared basis for informed inquiry, intelligent discussion, patient deliberation, and camaraderie in the pursuit of knowledge.

Liberal education serves freedom, but it does so by protecting scholarship, teaching, and learning from politicization. An institution dedicated to liberal education can't help but take a stand on issues central to its principal task such as free speech on campus and the equality under law of all students and faculty. Nevertheless, to the extent possible institutions of higher education must stay out of the political fray. Colleges and universities must never use the defense of the principles that make liberal education possible as an excuse to pressure students to conform to university orthodoxy or to censor the expression of views that dissent from the majority's beliefs and the conventional wisdom. By declining to take sides on the political controversies of the day, colleges and universities create room for faculty and students to vigorously examine and debate the political controversies of the day as well as the great and enduring issues that transcend our era. By refraining from adopting official positions on matters of partisan public debate, colleges and universities give students and faculty the opportunity to explore the many aspects of complex and

fraught topics and to develop – and revise – their opinions based on reason, evidence, discussion, and reflection.

By cultivating free minds, the Chase Center promises to make the contribution appropriate to an institution of higher education to the formation of free citizens. I congratulate you on the legislation you have crafted. You are creating, in the Chase Center, precisely the structure needed to renew a true civic education in America and for America.