

Q69 – What are two examples of civic participation in the United States?

DOUGLAS GINSBURG, Federal Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals, D.C. Circuit:

There are lots of ways to participate in the civic life of the republic. For starters: You can exercise your First Amendment right of free speech. Write a letter to the editor about an issue. And sound off to your elected officials or volunteer with a political campaign.

You can even run for office yourself. The minimum age for a representative in Congress is 25. For a senator – 30. But many state and city offices have lower minimum ages. In 2005, Hillsdale, Michigan swore in a high school senior as its mayor: 18-year-old Michael Sessions. Sessions raised his campaign war chest – \$700 – from a summer job.

But most important, you can take part in civic life by voting. At eighteen you can vote in a federal election – in some municipal elections at sixteen.

In the presidential election of 2000, George W. Bush won the state of Florida and therefore the presidency, by just 537 votes out of some six million cast. 537 is less than some senior high school classes. So, yes, your vote does count.