**May 1 is Law Day: Help us support the cornerstones of democracy**

By Margaret Wrenn Hickey and Larry J. Martin

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Democracy and the rule of law seem to be in retreat throughout the world: not only in Iran, Russia, and Hong Kong but also in countries such as Mexico, Poland, and Hungary.

What has happened to civics, civility, and cooperation, the cornerstones of our democracy? How are we weathering the challenges of the past several years? What is the condition of our democracy and do we continue to be committed to maintaining the principles that underlie the rule of law?

If you are struggling to understand this, you are not alone.

Freedom House, a U.S.-based independent watchdog organization that champions the advancement of freedom and democracy globally, states in their most recent annual report that “democracy is under attack by populist leaders and groups that reject pluralism and demand unchecked power to advance the particular interests of their supporters, usually at the expense of minorities and other perceived foes.”

According to this report, in 2021, democracy and the rule of law continued to erode in every region around the world. This marked the 17th consecutive year of overall decline, leaving the number of countries that are designated as democracies at its lowest point in the history of the report.

**Lawyers Teach Civics, Civility, and Cooperation**

In an increasingly polarized society, it is not clear how best to weather attacks to our democracy without veering into partisan or ideological waters. Yet lawyers support and defend an independent judiciary; fair, open and unfettered elections; a free press; and fidelity to our nation’s constitution and laws.

The past few elections – local, state, and national – have been chaotic and challenging to say the least. Past (and future) attacks on the U.S. Supreme Court, voter rights, and court systems are disturbing.

The good news is that lawyers are working to support the democratic system in our local communities, statewide, and nationally. They are uniquely qualified to understand the rules that apply to elections. They help voters understand their legal rights at the polls, they explain what is required to vote, such as proof of identity, and to see that ballots are allowed to be cast.

Through the State Bar of Wisconsin, lawyers participate in Wisconsin High School Mock Trial, which teaches students essential skills such as public speaking, critical thinking, and the art of forming a persuasive argument. Now more than ever, mock trial is instilling in our students the necessary knowledge and appreciation for the rule of law and the judicial system and how they form the foundation of our democracy. It nurtures the next generation of civic leaders while teaching them civility and cooperation.

Our democracy is at stake. This Law Day, please give thought to how you can personally make a difference toward supporting democracy. Our future is at stake.

*Law Day, May 1, is a national day to celebrate the rule of law in a free society. Margaret Wrenn Hickey is President of the State Bar of Wisconsin. Larry J. Martin is Executive Director and CEO.*