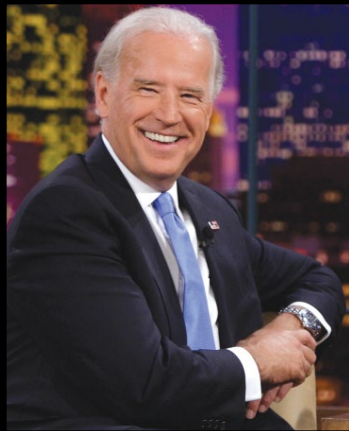


PROFILES IN CITIZENSHIP: HOW TO KEEP THE REPUBLIC



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Joe Biden

Vice President Joe Biden's rise from working-class, Irish-Catholic kid to the president's right-hand man is an unlikely story but in some ways a quintessentially American one. It was in his "Grandpop" Finnegan's kitchen in Scranton that he learned the first principles of politics: that no one and no group is above any other and that politics was a matter of personal honor.¹ Biden sat down with us on December 6, 2010, in Washington, D.C., and explained how those themes have guided his more than forty years of public service. Here are some of the vice president's words of wisdom for students.

On the importance of confidence:

[P]eople don't all show up on the playing field with the same equipment, and I'm not talking intellect. The great advantage I had is that I don't ever

remember a time my parents not drilling into me—"You're a man of your word, without your word you're not a man. Joey, nobody is better than you in the whole world, you're no better but nobody is better than you." My mother gave me absolute confidence. It was a gigantic, gigantic asset.

On keeping the republic:

I'd tell [students] to be engaged. . . . [Y]ou know that old quote from Plato, the penalty good men pay for not being engaged in politics is being governed by men worse than themselves. [Students] have nobody to blame but themselves, zero. My dad used to say never complain and never explain, and . . . that's exactly what I'd tell them . . . stop whining, get engaged. Number two, the political system is so wide open you can drive a Mack truck through it, so the idea that "Oh, God, I have to come from influence and money to have an impact?" Simply not true.

1. Joe Biden, *Promises to Keep* (New York: Random House, 2007), xv.