

50 Proof Through the Night Strategies (pttn.org)

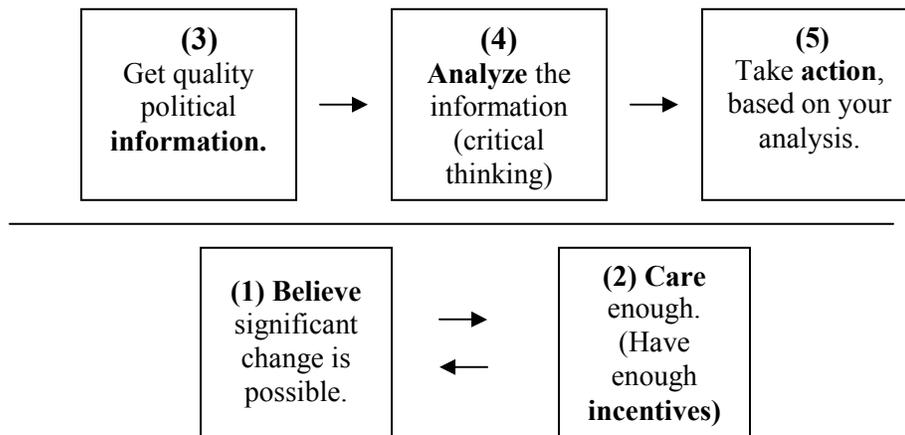
Proof Through the Night is a nonpartisan voter education and voter empowerment program. It's mainly web-based. We have a vision of creating an informed, critically-thinking and active American electorate. We expect that such an electorate would choose better leaders and policies. This would have multiple benefits: lower taxes, better public services, greater long-term international security and ultimately a higher quality of life for Americans as well as foreign policies that would help people in other countries.

Our vision is to cause a renewal of the electorate *within ten years*. This will seem impossible to most people, but we believe that as you read our strategies, each one will make the incredible goal seem more believable. In fact, if the goal is achieved, it would be as remarkable as landing on the Moon in a decade. It would perhaps be one of the greatest turning points in American democracy.

Proof Through the Night aims to help voters have all five essentials needed for effective political action:

An Individual Needs to Do Five Things to Become Part of an Informed Electorate

(The bottom two are the prerequisite foundation for the top three)



The following 50 strategies are divided among the five areas listed above. Perhaps the most pivotal strategies are the first two, the friend-to-friend chain reaction growth approach of the program, and also informing people that it's shockingly easy to gain a significant advantage over special interest lobbyists.

A. Strategies that help people believe that their actions, added to those of others, will be significant. (Also strategies to help people believe that PTTN will succeed.)

1. The personal witness of the friend who invites them (especially if the friend suddenly becomes more politically active and knowledgeable.) In other words, if some advertising

campaign states, “Here’s a one-stop political empowerment program that can renew the American electorate if enough people use it,” that’s a lot *weaker* than if someone close to you says to you, “Bob, I totally believe in this program. It’s helped me review the political basics, and plug into some news sources and advocacy sources, and it emails reminders to do regular political actions. I now believe I’m doing my fair share of action. And I believe this program *will* renew the electorate because everyone has friends that they can invite, support or lean on, and your friends have a better idea of what issues you care about and why, and so can make a case for why *you* will benefit.” [This personal contact idea is the probably the central strategy of this program.]

2. The explanation of how citizens can have a decisive 15:1 advantage over special interest lobbyists.¹ It then becomes easy to believe that half of Americans will become involved when they learn that they together it’s not too hard to have a massive impact.

3. Explain how fast a chain reaction can grow. If one person takes two months to master the basics, then two more months to supports an average of two people to do the same, and then two more months to support them to each support two others—and then does nothing else, then theoretically the chain reaction will reach the entire American electorate in five years. If people take an average of four months instead of two for each of the three steps, it will take ten years (one decade!) to have an informed and active American electorate.

Thus, the way this will grow is “of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

[Instead of promoting a four-month cycle, we’d like to ask people to shoot for a two-month cycle, and invite 3-4 people with the assumption that one or two will drop out. That way, if things slow down to a four-month cycle with only an average of two people, we would still turn around the American electorate in ten years. The other advantage is that a six-month intensive commitment may seem more doable than a year-long commitment.]

¹ The calculation: According to the Center for Public Integrity, there were 39,186 registered state lobbyists in 2005. There are also 35,866 lobbyists registered with the US Senate, and 23,822 registered with the House. In round numbers, that’s about 100,000 lobbyists (since many Senate and House lobbyists would be the same people). That number, times 2,000 hours per year is 200 million hours (200 M). Some of these lobbyists work in the public’s interest, but let’s assume that only one-fifth does. That would mean that 160 M hours a year are working against the public interest. Now imagine that 100 million Americans (less than half of the 220 million voting-age Americans) do just two hours a month of advocacy. (They would rely on the intelligence gathered by the public-minded lobbyists.) That would be (100 M x 2 hours x 12 months) or 2,400 M hours. So the professional lobbyists would be outgunned, 2400M to 160M, or 15 to 1. Certainly the lobbyists have a money advantage, but at election time the ballot box is stuffed with votes, not dollars. Imagine a 15:1 advantage on a football field! It’s HUGE! So the power of this idea is in getting people to realize that a huge advantage is possible with not too much effort — because it’s easy to imagine that 50% of voters could get fired up on issues enough to give just two hours a month. The idea could be promulgated in a YouTube video.

Actually an hour of a citizen’s time is not equal to an hour of lobbyist’s time. A more potent comparison would be if the 100 million citizens would donate \$50 per election cycle. This would yield \$5 billion, and considering that the total US Senate and House races, along with the Presidential race were \$3.9 billion (2004), it would outnumber the money spent nationally (especially if you take into account that much of that \$3.9 billion was already from small donors.) The 2012 races were \$6 billion not counting hidden monies. Yet these arguments basically still. Apply. In summary, the perception that the little guy must necessarily be outgunned by big money is completely wrong.

Doubts and counter-arguments to the above strategy:

a) Chain reactions always peter out. // Counterarguments: 1) A lot of things have gone viral. 2) If the incentives are great enough, people do take action. (Some incentives are mentioned in page.) 3) Organizations who want their members to have political power and skill will piggyback onto the chain reaction. (See strategies 6, 7 and 8 below.)

b) It never happened before. // Counterargument: Neither have all the mounting problems. The great anxiety should help create sufficient incentive for participation.

c) Many people aren't persuasive. They can't talk their friends into anything. // Counterargument: They can point invitees to our online videos that are much more persuasive and will do most of the job for them. They just add the witness of personally taking action, and being willing to personally support their friend or family member.

d) This will only spread on one strata of society. // As members grow, our number of volunteers will grow so that we will be able to translate the program into Spanish, make audio versions, and reach out to other strata and sub-cultures. Our volunteers may even one day be teaching computer literacy or literacy itself as part of "fighting for our country." We will keep finding ways to extend this to groups that are less likely to become empowered. Also, minority groups and disadvantages groups will recognize that PTTN and these tools can help them with their agendas.

[By the way, note that if the chain reaction gets rolling, then a person who says no to his first friend or family member will probably be asked again by someone else...and then again by someone else later on. If the first person does not turn them off by pestering them, they will likely be more impressed with each new person asking them to join.]

e) To the perpetual cynic who believes that "big money" can't be beaten, say this:

Perception and self-fulfilling prophecies are a major factor in politics. Your pessimism about politics may be the best friend of those who want to dominate you. As Stephen Biko said, "The most powerful weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed." In other words, your negative attitude itself serves the greedy and powerful. If you've already given up, then you are beaten. The greedy and powerful should hire your negative attitude to be their spokesperson! — That's because it has done their PR work for them in making you lose heart.

But self-fulfilling prophecies can work both ways. If you believe that you're beaten, then you are; but if you believe that small efforts can add up, then your confidence (and efforts) can inspire others, and that lead to a powerful movement. In other words, "Raindrops make rivers, and rivers move mountains." To use another analogy, one hornet is no match for a lion or a horse, but a swarm of hornets can send a lion or horse running. PTTN can work because the number of average "decent" people who are mainly looking out for themselves and their families and friends far outnumber the number of greedy, power-hungry people. These decent people won't always agree on issues or parties, but they have many common interests: not wanting to have a lower quality of life; a desire not to have their tax money

wasted; a desire not to be played or manipulated by greedy, unethical people; and our mutual long-term economic stability and national security.

People who are pessimistic about the power of their vote need to be reminded about how close elections such as the Al Franken senate election, and others. Probably many older voters can recall stories of how local politicians that offended voters were booted out of office by an angry electorate.

f) Some people are too busy with personal problems. // We have two responses:
1) Their friend (sponsor) will help support and encourage them, even to doing a few of their chores, so they can make time to study or act. Remember that our slogan is *There's more than one way to fight for your country*, and so, removing obstacles is fighting for our country. 2) "You and your children will be much harder pressed later if you don't act now. We'll pay more later if we don't act now. – But also check out the next strategy..."

4. For people who are too busy, we will have some original time-management tools, and also links to other time management tips (free, with little or no ads.) The idea here is that the person inviting someone should help their friend overcome whatever obstacles they face. In fact, they should *expect* them to take this seriously and follow-through. Expectation is a powerful force.

5. To address the doubt that enough people would join this, we plan to do a survey in 2014 to estimate the percentage of likely participation, and to find out which incentives or reasons would motivate people to participate.

6. One strategy will be to quickly build to 50 "founding" members (in honor of the 50 states.) This will give PTTN some starting credibility, and having the 50 members use our website and materials will help us get feedback and corrections on the content.

There's more than one way to fight for your country.

[The next three organizational strategies piggyback onto the one-to-one chain reaction:]

7. Whenever the chain reaction reaches someone who is a leader in a group that seeks political power (example: the Sierra Club) they will naturally lean on their members to do the program. Besides environmental groups, unions and minority groups seek political power, as do political groups of course.)

8. Once one group becomes involved we can contact the opposing group. For instance, if the Young Democrats start to use the PTTN tools, we can go to the Young Republicans and say that they will fall behind because the Young Democrats are using the tools!

9. We can encourage organizational contests between different branches of an organization, as they race toward 75% participation of their members. For instance, two chapters of the Urban League could race to win a certain prize. Or two fraternities. Or two universities in the same city. Et cetera.
10. A quick initial spread of participants will show people that word-of-mouth support and other actions works. The stats on our *The Proof* webpage will impress some people.
11. The attractiveness and ease of creating and using your own user webpage will help people believe that this will be doable for many. See the mock-up at pttn.org/theproof.
12. The argument that most Americans can probably get fired up enough about one or two issues to do two hours of advocacy a month. (Common hot button issues: social security, health care, the environment, campaign finance reform, etc.)
13. We're also asking participants to complete two brief surveys a year, so we can track activity and growth. When we compile and then publish these statistics on our website, it will help participants see that they really are making a difference, and it will help attract new members.
14. Ask for \$30 a year from those who can afford it. (\$15 a year, low income.) Once we have a surplus of funds, use them to extend our reach to people who aren't online, through a book, audio CDs, magazine articles, etc.
15. To help keep PTTN's image as spotless as possible, we won't take donations from foundations or other groups, but only from individual Americans. We also won't affiliate with other groups because then we'd have to keep track of their goings-on and whether or not they've made enemies.
16. People know that real change requires a commitment and usually the slow formation of new habits. We will ask a commitment both from the new participant, and from the person who invited them (to support and encourage the new participant.)

B. Strategies to cause caring and active engagement

17. Use first-person videos of people explaining why they care, and why the viewer should care. Thirty-second videos are probably more compelling than text.
18. Use the argument that things fall apart without ongoing **maintenance**. You maintain your health, car, home, and key relationships, and so on, so why do you think maintenance of your democracy can be ignored?
19. Use the argument that if we have to pass a test before we can drive, maybe we should be able to pass a (voluntary) test to show that we have mastered some of the basics. Hold up the test as "having the knowledge you wish every voter had."

20. Use the argument that one of the biggest **investments** you make is through your taxes. So, by spending a few more hours a month, why not try to get the most from the hundreds or thousands of dollars that you spend each year. (Better roads, better education for children, cleaner air, etc.)

21. Use the argument: Political action now will help minimize or eliminate future misery caused by looming problems *that have never been solved adequately*:

- * Soaring health care costs
- * Social Security in the near future
- * Huge national debt
- * Declining oil reserves and higher energy costs.
- * Global warming and the severe weather (droughts, hurricanes, etc.)

All these problems will cost more if they are put off. Think of involvement as a form of **insurance** that you pay on through your political action, not cash.

22-23. The “no-half measures” theme, and also the theme “There’s more than one way to fight for your country.” In other words, we’ve worked out what we think it takes to become informed and active. For some people it will take real effort as well as solid support from those who invite them. But this is “fighting for your country.” And we are not going to make the test too easy, or ask for less than what we believe is needed. It’s time to do things properly and adequately—no half measures.

24. Explain that we are not asking a lot. We’re are basically asking for a one-time commitment of about 5-15 hours to do some “core exercises” and pass a proficiency test; and then a commitment of: a) about one hour a week to take in quality politic news; b) two hours a month advocacy for a couple of issues; c) at election time, a couple more hours to study candidates and issues. Then we’re asking a few hours to invite and support two or three friends or family members to do what you did—so as to continue the chain reaction.

25. As mentioned, eventually create a version of the website in Spanish.

26. Eventually tier the website in four “tracks” so as to speak to people at different educational and social levels. Roughly the tracks might be:

A. 6th grade reading level/busy/unconvinced about politics being important. Those who don’t want to read much and who are so busy. They want a simple and streamlined presentation. It would have many short video clips.

B. High school level/ busy/ unconvinced about politics being important.

C. College level/ willing to read more/ already accepts and understands the importance of politics.

D. The busy professional who has social contacts and money to spend, and has an understanding of politics, but not so much time.

We call this time commitment “The Believable Deal” because we think that most people could be persuaded to accept this deal because they could imagine that a majority of other Americans would buy in, too – especially if people use the arguments of strategies 17-20, especially the one about all the growing problems lacking solutions.

27. Produce a series of entertaining YouTube videos that create a young, upbeat image that are themed on our slogan, “*There’s more than one way to fight for your country.*” Here are five video summaries as examples of the series:

A. About 12 people who are dressed normally are marching with notebook computers instead of guns. A “drill sergeant” young woman lines them and drills them on questions that are from the proficiency test (while a statement appears explaining that these questions are on our test). The “soldiers” answer all questions correctly. The “sergeant” approves, and the message flashes across the screen: *There’s more than one way to fight for your country.*

B. A young woman volunteers to take her friend’s kids to park, so she has time to study for the PTTN proficiency test. Next scene: A young man volunteers to mow grass for his friend so he can study PTTN. As he’s mowing the grass, the first woman passes by him, and as they are both wearing PTTN t-shirts, he salutes her. She smiles and returns the salute. The message flashes: *There’s more than one way to fight for your country.*

C. A young man had promised his girlfriend that he would study PTTN at the library. But he reneges, and laughs as he says, “So, how you gonna make me [study]?” She whistles and three of her girlfriends appear, to help her bodily carry him out as he struggles. She smirks with good-humored pleasure as he is subdued. Motto flashes: *There’s more than one way to fight for your country.*

D. Make a music video that changes some of the words of George Harrison’s song, “I’ve Got My Mind Set on You.” Change it to: “I’ve got my mind set on *Proof.*” This is a very upbeat and catchy song, and we can work in PTTN themes easily.

E. Start a video with a woman standing before a distinguished building with pillars. She intones, “In the year 1787, fifty-five men wrote one of the greatest love letters the world have ever known. It began like this: “We the people of the United States.” It was the United States Constitution, one of the greatest testaments to the values of equality, freedom and justice ever written. The video quotes Thomas Jefferson twice:

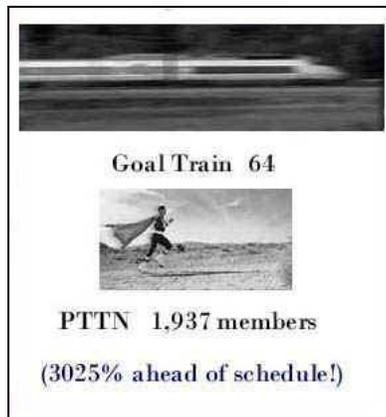
“I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves. And if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise

their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education.”

“If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.” – Thomas Jefferson

Then the video transitions to the current dismal state of the electorate and then the PTTN solutions.

28. Using the analogy of Superman racing a train, create a mild drama on our *The Proof Page* Webpage: Have one counter next to a graphic of a speeding train that represents a geometric progression beginning July 1, 2013 and doubling every four months – 1, 2, 4, 8.... This accelerating “Goal Train” will “arrive” at a majority of the US electorate in almost exactly ten years, 2022.



Then have a second counter of our active participants, alongside a caped superhero graphic. Below that, have a readout: “We are at X% of our goal.”

Early on, we are likely to get 2000% ahead of the Goal Train. (50 participants within the first eight months.) This will encourage optimism and make it easier to keep ahead of the Goal Train.

29. By having a comment box for feedback and suggestions at the bottom of each webpage, we can generate a mild sense of participation in the evolution of PTTN. (This falls short of creating a wiki. A wiki in which a full-time editor would vet everything prior to appearance might be best, but we can’t do that at this time.) In either case, on top of the box is an alternative slogan that encourages engagement:

Our secret weapon is no secret: It is *We the People of the United States*

30. Create a video to help some people get over their emotional blocks to political action. Some people have a distaste for politics for several different reasons:

- a) They don’t like the conflict that’s part of the democratic process.
- b) They feel that they are being lied to, and don’t know how to get accurate information.

c) Politics seems too complex. (They don't have the critical thinking tools to break it down.)

d) It brings up too many negative feelings, such as anger or contempt.

The video can help them find ways to enjoy politics—for instance, to some extent it's a drama, and a game of strategy. We can also encourage those who really don't like politics to “do your fair share of action, and then don't worry about it.” You'll be more effective than the news junkies who only watch TV and read blogs and never take action.

31. Create a board game slightly like Trivial Pursuit that becomes “Political Pursuit.” This becomes a fun way to bone up on the basics of politics, as well as some elements of critical thinking (for instance, the names of logical fallacies, and the names of propaganda techniques.)

32. We want to emphasize that people will feel better as soon as they begin to use their newfound knowledge and skills. That exercise of newfound political power will give them a real basis for hope. We want to have people feel good as the start of the process, rather than imagine that people will wait a decade for a payoff. The informed, critically thinking and active electorate begins right away, with each person.

33. Use the critical thinking skills as a selling point. People can use these skills in almost all areas of their lives.

34. Have PTTN Meet-Ups in coffee shops and other locations where people can come together to do self-education, news intake, critical thinking or advocacy.

C. Get quality information in time

35. Our Political Info page already has links to about 175 links total in eleven knowledge areas. Two prominent ones are Vote-smart.org and CitizenJoe.Org.

36. One of the core exercises in the online course shows you where to find out about bills *before* they get voted on.

37. One of the core exercises in the online course shows you where to find voting records, source of donation information, and candidate position statements.

38. One exercise in the online course has you pick some issues that you would like to advocate and then search online to plug into the “action alerts” systems of local, state and national advocacy organizations of your choice.

39. One of the core exercises has you study a variety of news sources, and then pick ones you like. You are encouraged to create your own user page, and put your favorite news

links on it. An exercise also has you analyze your day so you can work in the format of news that works for you (e.g.s. radio on the commute to work, online news while eating breakfast, smart phone while jogging, etc.)

D. Analyze the information intelligently

40. In the online-course, you can learn the background basics and mechanics of government (branches of gov't., how a bill becomes law, economic basics, etc.)

41. In the online-course, you will be able to read material or see videos about deception techniques.

An idea for some related videos: Have two actors pretend to be debating candidates. Have a panel of three people with buzzers who buzz them when they use a deception technique. (Thus it becomes like a game show, and we see the candidates frown when they get caught.) To make the video instructive, at first have the panel people name the deception technique, such as “glittering generalities,” but then, to induce the viewer’s active participation, later in the video, one of the panelists buzzes, then a multiple choice question appears on the screen, prompting to pick the deception technique that was used from four options. This trains viewers to become familiar with deception techniques.

42. In the online-course, you can read materials or see videos about critical thinking. One pertinent exercise on the site has the participant choose between 10 pairs, such as:

- Corporations and business owners are greedy.
- Corporations and business owners make the country strong.

- People are basically good and should be allowed to do what they want within reason. They should have freedoms, as long as they don't interfere with other's freedoms.
- People are basically selfish and irrational. If their behavior is not controlled through laws and authority, they will harm each other.

At the end of these pairs, comes the real point of the exercise. People are then asked to figure out *where* their beliefs come from: *Why* do you believe what you believe? Are they based on hearsay, on parental attitudes, personal experience, etc?

43. The online *Politics for Power* quizzes and the *Critical Thinking for Politics* quizzes will be “bite-sized,” each taking 5-10 minutes. This makes them more doable. The quizzes will be set up so that people will be prompted to review the knowledge they didn’t know three times—so that it will be efficiently learned. We will even create a video explaining how the review schedule maximizes retention. – This “learning how to learn” knowledge will also be a small perk to those interested in learning other kinds of information.

E. Decide and act on the information

44. The “Study and Party” idea: Create a new tradition for the weekend before the primary or general election. The idea is for someone to invite a few friends to an informal social event, with food (such as chips and dip, or pizza and soda, or wine and cheese, or potluck.) Then in about 1.5 hours go through the issues and candidates, using candidate information via PTTN or other sites.

This tradition could be promoted through a video that perhaps would compare it to Deliberation Day (a similar but less workable idea by two Yale and Stanford professors.)

45. To help people see the importance of advocacy, we came up with the following analogy. If you think about the people who just vote versus the people who vote and do advocacy, we compare them to two football teams. One team practices twice a year (during the primary and general elections) but the other practices every week (with weekly news intake and monthly advocacy.)— So we ask you, which team is going to win? Next question: Which team *deserves* to win? The majority of Americans are decent people, concerned for their own welfare and for their loved ones. *Proof Through the Night* is a tool to help them win.

46. It will increase the leverage of PTTN participants and PTTN itself if we ask and expect participants to do advocacy on at least one structural issue. Structural issues are issues that affect the efficiency of the political process itself (such as campaign finance reform, gerrymandering, the lobbyist-elected official revolving door, or the integrity of voting machines.) Structural issues are not as emotionally gripping for most people, but we can make a strong case for structural action being necessary. – Otherwise we cannot expect government to become more efficient and less wasteful in the long term.

47. Besides taking on one structural issue, we will ask people to do advocacy on at least on other issue of concern to them, and to study it in *detail*, too. – Assuming this program chain reacts, it will be better for people to be intelligently informed and active on *one* issue, rather than having a superficial understanding of many issues, and taking action on issues in ways that would be counterproductive. Similarly, we will encourage people to find advocacy groups that can do some of the analysis and thinking for them, but only after they’ve carefully vetted the advocacy group.

48. Via our website you will be able to set up email reminders to be sent to yourself later. Examples: to take action on advocacy, to invite others to the Party and Study event, to support your immediate ‘descendents’ in the chain reaction, etc.

49. We encourage people to maintain a focus all the way through to action. Many people who are fairly knowledgeable politically still rarely act on the knowledge. So we created the acronym FITA which sounds like “fight” as in “more than one way to fight for our country. FITA means “feeling-information-thinking-action.” In other words, once you have strong feelings about an issue, such as anger or unhappiness, you gather the information, then you think about it critically, coming to decision, and then you act. So

we can encourage people who don't like politics much by saying, in about 45-60 minutes, you can go all the way from feelings to action; and you will be doing more than many political news junkies who only consume opinion, or blog to each other about it. You get it done, and move on to other things!

50. Invite people who can create webpages to create a personalized political action webpage. On their webpage, they could put links to their favorite news sources, advocacy information sources, and their representatives contact information for letter writing/calling/emailing. They could also personalize it with motivational picture, quotes and links to songs, such as favorite version of the Star-Spangled Banner. Having all this on one page, streamlines it and help keep them focused.

Summary

In the Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln spoke of soldiers who gave “the last full measure of devotion.” A one-decade campaign to create an informed and active American electorate could be called “the *next* full measure of devotion.” These 50 strategies may be the foundation for both an all-around nonpartisan website and a ten-year movement to renew the American electorate. You are welcome to contribute more strategies!

What's Needed to Complete the project:

1. A well-balanced and representative advisory board would need to be formed to 1) prevent accusations of partisanship, and 2) gather enough political expertise and credentials to keep political experts from criticizing us for a lack of expertise.
2. Using the rough draft of content that's online, a group of 2-3 writers who have an understanding of politics, need to fine-tune the educational content. They'd also need to write the different levels of the online test.
3. YouTube videos would need to be made, using the theme, “There's more than one way to fight for your country.”
4. The programming would need to be beta-tested by volunteers. We would have to assess if the central strategy was working—a chain reaction of political self-education in which people come up to speed politically, and then urge two or three friends or relatives to participate, so that the revitalization of the American electorate can take place.
5. Eventually, we either need to form an organization or find a nonprofit home for Proof Through the Night. The web site's quiz answers will need to be updated periodically, and, assuming that people make donations, there will be money to find ways to draw in and educate parts of the electorate that the initial materials don't reach.