

The Power of Compromise

Democracy is often described as the will of the people and that is very much true, but what I learned during my week in Washington, DC is that it is just as much the art of disagreement and compromise. Listening to a diverse group of speakers and leaders who have worked at the highest levels of government, I began to understand that democracy is messy, difficult, and requires people who are willing to work together even when it would be easier not to. At a time in our nation's history when both sides of the aisle seem very far apart on every issue possible and democracy seems to be failing, this week emphasized for me how crucial it is to have good leaders in government who are willing to work through disagreement and are committed to collaboration over division.

No two people are ever going to completely agree with each other on everything. However, just because disagreement exists doesn't mean that it should turn to hate. Hate is not how anything gets accomplished in government and it certainly does not help the functioning of democracy. Instead of hate - which seems to be so loud and on the front page of every news outlet currently - this week I learned that we should instead turn to compromise. Compromise is how some of the best ideas and policies are created. If there was only one party or one side, there would not be as much diversity created in government. As Major General Charles Bolden put it "we need competition of thought." Competition of thought and differences of opinion are amazing things. This can lead to some really wonderful policy being created but compromise is necessary for this to happen. Government officials have to work together using their "competition of thought" to create meaningful change in the United States. Compromise is democracy. The two are inseparable and compromise is absolutely necessary for the functioning of democracy in the United States. According to Major General Bolden "we are not going anywhere alone." As someone who flew a space mission with a Cosmonaut, he lived out this concept in real life. We have to work together in government to accomplish anything. This is why compromise is so important for the successful functioning of our government and why it is so imperative that both sides stop pointing fingers and work together to make change.

Compromise can only happen if we elect quality leaders who are willing to collaborate with those who have opposing views. General Caine perfectly captured the type of leaders we need to elect by stating good leaders need to "be a selfless servant." If someone is selfless this means they are willing to sacrifice and compromise what they believe in for the greater good. We need leaders who are willing to die to self and at times not get one hundred percent of what they want in order to serve those who put them in power. If we don't elect selfless leaders there will be a lack of compromise and a lack of compromise contributes to a lack of democracy. Having good leaders who care about serving those who elected them as their priority means being the biggest headline is not the most important factor in decision making.

This week provided me with so many examples of selfless leaders who care deeply about those they serve and try to compromise where they can in order to make the world a better place. Brian Kamoie, a past delegate, encapsulated this perfectly: "public service is not self service." Being a good leader means serving those around you, not serving yourself. Serving those around you sometimes calls for compromise, which is essential for democracy.

Ultimately my week in Washington, DC showed me that democracy is not failing because of disagreement, it is challenged when people lose their willingness to compromise and work through their disagreement. Senator Markey said "Democracy is meant to be difficult, but every previous generation has made it work and so can we." To make democracy work we need good leaders who are willing to collaborate and work together through their differences. The speakers we were blessed to have the chance to learn from demonstrated events that progress is only made possible when leaders choose to compromise instead of divide. If our democracy is to succeed, it is not because we will erase our differences but because we have good leaders who work through them together and after spending this week with 104 other amazing delegates from around the country I am encouraged and believe this is attainable.