

The most HOPEFUL conversation I've had at the Capitol

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Wednesday, Jan. 29

Good morning! We are almost 3 weeks into the 2025 legislative session and that means one thing — I am about 2 weeks behind on everything.

But it is what it is. The important thing to note is I have something POSITIVE to write about today! I often write about what's wrong in the Republican Party or in politics in general, but today I get to share with you guys about the most hopeful conversation I've had inside the Capitol in seven years.

On Wednesday I had the opportunity to have two conversations with a handful of high school students. One was a homeschool student from the Des Moines area who was incredibly respectful, well-mannered, conversational and I'm pretty sure "leans" to the right.

The other conversation was with a group of four high school students who are from different areas of the state but all had a couple of things in common — first, they are fairly conservative, and second, they had a lot of questions.

And asking questions shows that they care.

Now, unlike a politician, I warned them I was going to be brutally honest in my responses and not waste our time by trying to convince them our system isn't in desperate need of repair.

All four were extremely attentive and asked great questions. They were respectful. They were mature. Honestly, they were how ever parent I know would want their 16- or 17-year-old child to act.

And we talked for a while. I hope they didn't get bored because I sort of got on a roll. I'm grateful for every opportunity I get to speak with people or groups, but it is special when high school and college kids are part of the conversation.

We went through quite a number of things — the system, the money game, the kickbacks, the issues, the need for passion, the need to stand up for what you believe, the importance of not apologizing for your conservatism. And I'm sure there was even more.

Nothing happens in this life that isn't orchestrated by God. On Monday night, I had the opportunity to speak with the Dyersville Tea Party group. I extremely enjoyed it. One of the younger people who attended asked about reaching the next generation. Someone else had previously highlighted the lack of young people at the event.

For those counting at home, the topic came up twice. And then, with that group of high school students, it came up a third time in less than 24 hours. Three is a special number and has biblical significance. So what maybe could have or should have been a brief conversation turned into a much longer talk.

But I mean, how often do you have four high school students genuinely seeking answers about how our government works and, more importantly, how they can make our government work better?

We tend to think of young people as hopeless liberals who unfortunately have been indoctrinated by our educated system to be little Marxists. But I am pleased to report that isn't the case for all of them. And honestly, I think it's time to start wondering if maybe it isn't even most of them.

Young men are more conservative than they have been in decades. And it sure seems to me that there are plenty of young women who are gravitating to the “radical” side where we think someone who wants to play women’s sports should be — wait for it — a woman.

I will be honest. I was tired on Tuesday. My son Tate is a Buffalo Bills fan, so I didn’t head to Des Moines until after the game on Sunday night. That means I arrived “late Sunday,” or — more accurately — early Monday. Then, I spent seven hours on the road going to the group in Dyersville and speaking with their group — which I literally cannot say how much I enjoyed that time! But it meant arriving back in Des Moines very late on Monday. And the 8 a.m. Tuesday subcommittee came quick.

By mid-day Tuesday, I was dragging. I guess I’m getting old.

But then I had that conversation with those students. And on one hand I want to refer to them as young men and women, but on the other hand I want to refer to them as children — because at the end of the day, while they’re teetering on the verge of adulthood, at the end of the day they are still kids.

And as much as I’d like to think I might have “taught” them something, they actually taught — or reminded — me about something.

Oftentimes I’m asked if I think we will “win” this fight or that political battle. I usually give a pretty honest, candid answer of “I don’t know that we’ll win. But I know we have to engage.”

I think one of the reasons people ask that question is because they want to hear a different answer, and a much simpler one — yes.

They want to hear yes because they want hope. They want someone else to give them hope.

But as I had this conversation with these young people, I realized there is an incredible amount of hope in each of them. Again, they were articulate, they were thoughtful, they were curious, they were caring, they were genuine. In many ways, they were much more impressive than many “adults.”

Everything seems to indicate that young people are hopelessly lost liberals. But it just isn't reality. And this conversation proved that.

These young people I talked with yesterday, they all had one more thing in common — they were hopeful and they were reason to hope.

That hope that there are people in the “next generation” who share our beliefs and our values and have the backbone to defend them.

Sometimes I think we spend so much time trying to change the minds of people who don't agree with us we forget to encourage those younger people who agree with us to be bold, unashamed and unapologetically conservative.

We should prepare them to do that. After all, they're likely going to have a few more years to do that than we are at this point.

While I sure hope something I said inspired and encouraged them, I know they inspired and encouraged me. And I hope that can inspire and encourage all of you as well.

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