

## *Reflections on the 2017 Emerging Leaders Program*

Monticello's east facade is one of the most-recognized home elevations in America. Beneath it lies the town of Charlottesville; not far away is Monroe's house; a little further is Madison's mansion, with the second-floor study in which our Constitution was largely penned. Ink stains still mark the pine floor, there. A day's ride further by horse and you're at Washington's home, perched over the Potomac.

It's hard not to think about government, and particularly about democracy, when you're in central Virginia's horse country.

And the Emerging Leaders Program gathers here every summer, at the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business. The campus echoes Jefferson's main quadrangle at UVA: Georgian brick buildings flanking a courtyard. Each classroom contains the latest technologies for presentation, and from the terraced seats everyone can see everyone else, and the instructor. At the University of Virginia the word "instructor" is taken seriously, and differently: last names and the word "professor" are nearly prohibited; the instructor asks questions, and the whole room discusses.

This works well among 20 year-olds, but works spectacularly when the students have families, careers, and up to 75 years of living under their belts (remember, newish legislators may have recently retired from an accomplished career, or be just starting their first one. They could be currently-serving soldiers or sailors; they might be grandparents, or new parents; they can certainly be from wide-open cropland, from the mountains, or from a city.)

We gathered for three days, and SLLF let me tag along. By the time we said goodbye, it was like saying bye to the kids you'd spent a year with in your college dorm. Conversations had been personal, deep, covering experiences, beliefs, goals.

On the first whole day we talked about "the Second Machine Age," a name for the digitization washing now through all of our economy and society. Thanks to computers and communication, all sorts of things can be spread to every nook and cranny on earth, in almost no time. People who create valuable things can make more money than Scrooge McDuck had, but other people's labor is worth less, now. This *can* increase our standard of living, or hugely increase gaps in wealth and income. Or do both. Those of us involved in policy need to understand the trends, because those trends will drive economic change for decades.

Then we discussed James Baldwin's short story *Sonny's Blues*, from 1957. There's a reason James Baldwin is well known. You should get this story, and read it, if you have any taste for fiction at all. Our conclusion: reading fiction can have far-reaching benefits. So can playing music, so rediscover your old instrument, or pick up a new one. Make time for what matters, and these things matter. (I sound preachy. I apologize.)

What else to tell you about three days together, in a cradle of American government?

*\* The Civil War was unintended. And it mightn't have ended as it did. Trust between parties, or the lack of it, matters a great deal. We will help our country if we find the courage and patriotism to look history straight in the eye.*

*\* Our legislative colleagues in other states, have crafted good solutions to many problems faced by our own state. The more people we know, and the more we talk to each other, the fewer times we might have to reinvent the same wheel.*

*\* Sometimes it takes research, listening, and empathy to understand important problems faced by the people we serve. For example, not everyone has been helped at an early age into having good relationships with a bank. Many adults are, or feel they are, excluded from the world of banking. This makes MANY parts of life REMARKABLY harder.*

*\* Often when parties interact, a successful outcome requires trust. Two parties that have established some trust, can achieve results that benefit each more than if they didn't (think, the United States-Canada economic relationship.) Two parties that have established little trust, are often stuck in interactions that benefit each other less than they might (think, the India-Pakistan economic relationship.) Trust is not an item of small importance, so the actions or time it might take to enhance trust, are not unimportant.*

Those were a few observations, reached while reading books, discussing books, walking and talking together, and even going on field trips. I haven't had as much fun since. . . college; but in college I tried to "shoot" a flaming jigger of rum, and destroyed a long-serving moustache. Burnt hair smells like a pile of burnt tires.

Along the way we reminded ourselves that leadership, often, is about inspiring *others* to be extraordinary. All of us have been so inspired at some point, and very often by someone we knew well, by someone not at all famous.

Each of us can be such a person, for others.

We reminded ourselves that humans are inclined to obey figures of authority (things don't always seem this way, but the research is clear.) This raises the stakes of our own leadership, and the importance of thinking clearly, and according to our best values. Our example and our efforts have exaggerated effect. We have a responsibility to make those things count, for good.

I have to return to Trust, because it kept showing up in our thinking, like someone else's music on those spring days on campus.

No one planned for our Civil War to happen; people thought one thing would happen, then tried to make another thing happen, and then everything blew in an entirely different direction, and that was basically that. For most of five years Americans killed each other with frightening efficiency, and destroyed homes, businesses, crops, towns. The event is not behind us, still.

A deficit of trust between parties, was essential to this outcome. No one chose the war that happened, really. Hostility, misunderstanding, and lack of good talk greased the rails; the train slid down them, and off the bridge.

Today, as always, in our states and in our country, there are differences that can lead to strong feelings. That's part of our species, and it will happen in any community a fraction of our size. As legislators we need to listen carefully to others. We don't need to agree with others, but we do need to listen closely, with a genuine desire to understand. We need to respect others as our fellow citizens, and make them feel that respect. It sounds simple. Maybe it is. Simple or not, little we do is more important.

Next year, if SLLF lets me go again, I'll make the pilgrimage to Washington's house. He found the people of my part of the country to be infuriating, but he held his tongue. He's still my hero. He deserved a longer retirement. At least he got a city, an obelisk, and a banknote.

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