

Why Our Leaders in Washington Should Tour D.C.

☒ Last week, my family went on vacation to Washington D.C. My wife and I had never been there, and after our children expressed some interest in American history at Mount Rushmore last year, we thought it would be a good summer destination. For the most part, it was. The monuments and memorials were extremely impressive. The wide range of museums offered up a plethora of fascinating, historical relics. The people we met, whether it be federal employees or fellow tourists, seemed generally friendly.

Throughout the trip though, the cynic in me was continually keeping an eye peeled for evidence. What kind of evidence? Well, I've always wondered what it is about Washington D.C. that changes the people who we elect to go there. I wanted to know what it was about the town that makes so many of our elected leaders forget that they work for *us*. I hoped to learn what it is, exactly, that leads them to believe that they're there to build personal power and to extend their careers and prestige while routinely dodging and demagoguing the most dire problems our nation faces.

I started with the water. While it's stunningly difficult to locate a water-fountain in Washington D.C., I eventually found one. While the taste of D.C. tap-water certainly didn't stack up with what I'm used to here in Colorado, I found nothing peculiar with it and my family didn't report any odd behavior from me afterwards. Well, nothing out of the usual anyway. So, it must not be the water that's transforming our leadership.

Next, I checked out the buildings where these people work. We took tours of both the White House and The U.S. Capitol. While my family and I walked through these historic buildings, I watched the doorways for servants clad in togas blowing

through trumpets, throwing rose petals into the air, and rolling out red carpets as politicians entered and exited rooms. I saw none of that. On the contrary, actually... I was surprised by the close proximity of these politicians' offices to where the public is allowed to roam. I stood just outside the doors of the top big wigs in the U.S. Congress and just downstairs from the Oval Office. It seems to me that it would have to take some real effort by our leaders to scrape the futures of everyday Americans out of their minds when they're routinely surrounded by our faces.

Could it be the humidity in the air? After leaving our hotel's pool each evening, my family would drape our swimsuits across a shower-curtain rod overnight and find that 24 hours later, they still weren't even close to being dry. Could D.C's climate somehow be dampening the thought-processes of our leaders? Well, I kind of doubt it. If that were the case, half the country would be suffering from the same, mind-altering disorder.

I finally concluded that the ailment must stem from something unseen by the public – something not exuding from the town itself, but rather from an environment out of sight of most Americans. It lives and thrives somewhere behind the thick walls of those stately buildings where *We the People* are limited access. It's a place where our leaders can unashamedly saddle future generations of Americans with a growing national debt of \$16 trillion, endlessly intrude on our personal freedoms, and restrain entrepreneurs from creating wealth and jobs... all for purely political purposes. It's an ugly place.

Washington D.C. itself, however, is *not* ugly. In fact, I found it incredibly interesting that our nation's history, as taught by tour-guides and short-films within the historic halls of our federal institutions, paints a proud picture of just how our country became great. Clear insight is given into how our federal government is *supposed* to work, and what its proper role is, as designed by our founding fathers. Individual

freedom is extensively hailed, as is our declared independence from an oppressive government. Our past leaders are honored for their humility and selflessness, and the American spirit and work-ethic are praised.

What is taught to Washington D.C. visitors today, as part of a federally-sanctioned curriculum, are the very same fundamentals that our current government and media regularly mock when those fundamentals are promoted by the Tea Party or libertarian-leaning politicians. There's no mention of hand-outs and entitlements in the presentation – only the pursuit of happiness. There's no demonizing of the wealthy, which most of our founding fathers were. Their success is presented in a favorable light.

Most importantly, the positions held by our public servants are accurately defined, and the limits of their power are applauded for the wisdom in which they were tailored.

How ironic it was that at the very same time I was watching a film in the U.S. Capitol that specifically spelled out the importance of our legislative branch and its distinction of powers from the executive branch, President Obama was announcing just a few blocks away that he was bypassing congress to change how our immigration laws are enforced.

An hour later, our Capitol tour-guide was explaining the significance of a historical portrait that documented George Washington resigning his commander-in-chief powers. In doing so, Washington denied himself a king's chair in order to establish civilian-authority within our democracy. And as our guide spoke, pundits in the mainstream media were trumpeting our current president's *politically smart* overstepping of his bounds.

It's astonishing that our leaders in Washington so often seem completely oblivious to the history and framework that are so pridefully taught in the lobbies of the very buildings from

where they serve. During campaign season, we often hear the term “disconnected” thrown around. It’s done so as a way to paint a political opponent as being out of touch with their constituents. It’s basically just an election-time tool. But it can be real too, as evidenced in its purest form inside the tall, white buildings that reside at the center of Washington D.C.

I believe that our leaders in Washington would do themselves, and those who they represent, an enormous favor by stepping out of their offices and going on a tour of D.C. If they listen to their guides and the informational films, they might actually learn something – even if its something they should have learned long before they ever ran for office.