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Nixon's Visit A 'Chance Of A Lifetime'

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*By Annabeth Miller,
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Lesson plans were put on the back burner Tuesday morning, as the students in Cherie Smith's Family and Consumer Sciences class had a pair of very special visitors.

The guests at Dexter High School were Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon and First Lady Georganne Nixon, who visited DHS to commend the school for participating in the A+ scholarship program and to encourage the students in their studies.

Mrs. Nixon is a former schoolteacher, so the classroom was familiar territory for her. She used the classroom visit to encourage the high school students to consider teaching as a career.

"It's one of the greatest jobs that there is," the First Lady told the high school students. "So anyone who thinks that they might like to do this someday, maybe you'll be standing here some day helping other people."

The Governor used his classroom time to encourage the students to participate in A+, a scholarship program offered by the state. To qualify, students in participating schools must meet the requirements established for the program, including minimum grade point average (GPA), attendance, tutoring, and good citizenship standards. In return the A+ Program provides two years of free tuition and academic fees at Missouri's community colleges.

Nixon told the students that A+ has two main values.

"Number one, you have to go to school and you have to keep your grades up. And if you do that we make a promise on our side as a state that you qualify for two years tuition at community colleges across the state. It is a great way to avoid what so many young folks are finding these days, which is the weight of debt because of a college education," he said.

He told the students that a recent study by the Federal Reserve reported that there is more student loan debt in America today than all the credit card debt in America.

"Think of all the people with credit cards," he commented. "What we're doing here in Missouri is to provide students with an opportunity. It's a great pathway to make sure you have a chance to move forward."

Nixon opened the floor to the students to ask questions, joking that he was next to the door in case the questions were too touch. Senior Megan Robert asked the governor about citizenship, and his definition of a good citizen.

Focus On Duties Of Citizen

The state's chief executive advised the students to not be distracted by "mudslinging" and political argument, but to stay focused on the duties of a citizen.

"We live in the most open democracy in the world. Everybody can have an effect. Everyone in this room is going to be eligible to vote. Every one of you has as much voice as Warren Buffet has on who the next President of the United States is once you turn 18 and can vote. Voting is a responsibility," he said.

Other responsibilities include informed, being involved, following the laws, and being a good citizen.

"There are a lot of responsibilities (in being a good citizen), but they present you with the opportunity to do and be whatever you want," he concluded.

Jessica Snider asked the state's top elected official about today's primary election.

"I believe in primary elections," he replied. "I'm a believer that we should have elections to choose candidates instead of party caucus. I thought we should have a presidential primary, which we are having today."

However, Nixon explained to Jessica and the parties determine way the convention delegates are chosen. One party – the Democrats – chose by the primary, the other – the Republicans – choose by caucus. Unfortunately, he explained, the two parties could not agree on timing and other factors that created the situation that required today's election, which will not chose the delegates to the GOP convention.

"This is one of the reasons you need to be informed," Nixon said after his explanation. "People will give you snippets of information that only affect their side of a questions. And that's dangerous in a democracy. Being informed as a citizenry is really important."

Nixon's answer to her really complex question impressed Snider.

"Right before I left the house (today) I heard on the news that he vetoed to have the Missouri primary in March, and it actually kind of got me fired up," Snider said after class. "I then got to school and found out he'd be in my class and I could ask him a question. I wasn't sure how he'd respond to my question, but I thought he responded very well, and it made more sense to me after hearing him explain it."

Classmate Shyann Jines agreed that she appreciated the Nixons' visit.

"I enjoyed it," Jines said. She is a freshman at DHS. "It was something new and it was enjoyable thought."

She did, indeed, listen to the governor in class and during his remarks later in the morning when he addressed the DHS Student Body in the Bearcat Event Center.

"I think A+ is a very good thing because some parents and kids may not be able to afford to go off and pay for college. But with this you can. I am really thinking about attending Mizzou! but I'm really not sure yet."

By taking advantage of A+ tuition, she might be able to start her college career at a community college and finish her degree at University of Missouri, she said.

"I thought his speech in the BEC was nice. Very glad he came," said Snider.

Teacher Cherie Smith was impressed by the Nixons' interaction with the students and proud the students had a chance to visit with the governor.

"We were so excited and were honored to have the Governor visit our classroom," Smith said. "The kids couldn't believe how down to earth he was. The impact was huge. This was a chance of a lifetime. How many kids (and adults) will ever have the opportunity to meet and have a conversation with any governor? When the Governor, his wife, and I were talking during the drill, we spoke a bout the best state parks to camp and hike in within the state of Missouri. It was such an exciting experience."

Photo above: Governor Jay Nixon and First Lady Georganne Nixon chat with DHS teacher Cherie Smith on Tuesday. The Nixon's spent some time in Smith's Family and Conuber Science class. (ShowMe Times Photo by Annabeth Miller)

ShowMe Times Photo Gallery

Gov. and Mrs. Nixon at DHS

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