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Congressman Jason Smith's Capitol Report - Learning and Serving

APRIL 08TH 2018 BY DEE LOFLIN

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**Congressman Smith Capitol Report
Learning and Serving
April 6, 2018**

Every year, I am honored to have the privilege of nominating outstanding young men and women from southern Missouri for appointment to our nation's finest service academies. In the spring, I am overcome with emotion when calling many of the same students to tell them they have been admitted to one of our nation's prestigious service academies.

Earlier this spring I traveled to West Point and had the opportunity to visit with the cadets I have nominated in recent years and as well as other cadets from Missouri. We had lunch together and they told me about their academy experience and what they were looking forward to doing next – serving their country. Lucas Manion from Park Hills, Taylor Brooks from Dora, Garrett Manley from Marston, Malachi Leece from Webb City, Chris Radford from Bourbon, Parker Petersen from Kirksville and Kalen Kahn from Bonne Terre, while unique and inspirational each in their own way, together they represent the same shared vision of service before self, emboldened by the motto which unites them, "This We'll Defend." While getting one of the best educations in the world, these young men will have the honor of serving the best country in the world. Their dedication to America is inspiring and one of the many reasons they have been appointed to such prestigious schools.

I also had the opportunity to pause and remember Tom Surdyke, a brave Missourian and West Point cadet I had the privilege of nominating in 2015. Tom selflessly sacrificed his own life to save the life of a drowning civilian while on a vacation with friends just before the start of his sophomore year at West Point. He embodied service and put others before himself even in his last moments on earth.

By air, land and sea, the U.S. Armed Services have defended America's freedoms and fought bravely for our rights as an independent nation. Our service academies set demanding academic and physical standards that ensure the continuity of our troops and produce exceptional officers to lead our military.

Most recently, I had the privilege of congratulating a new class of four Missourians on their appointment to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, the Air Force Academy and the Naval Academy.

Jonathan "J.T." Meinke from Jackson received an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and was honored during a ceremony at Jackson High School this week. And John "J.P." Schuchardt from Cape Girardeau, who will attend the U.S. Naval Academy this Fall, was recognized during a ceremony at my office in Cape Girardeau. I also want to congratulate Wyatt Murphy from Poplar Bluff and Christopher Steward from Campbell who have both accepted their appointments to the U.S. Air Force Academy.

Only the most outstanding and dedicated young men and women are admitted to these institutions. These young adults have proved their leadership abilities and academic prowess at home and earned a spot to study and serve with the brightest at our nation's service academies. They are now standing out as leaders among their peers at West Point, the Air Force Academy and the Naval Academy.

I'm so proud of each and every one of Missouri's service academy appointees. As you say a prayer for our Missouri cadets and all those from Missouri serving in the Armed Forces, know their futures are bright. Be proud that these talented young men and women will continue to excel in their military careers and that they are leading in the fight to keep our country safe and secure.

LAST UPDATED ON APRIL 08TH 2018 BY DEE LOFLIN

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