

Observation Assessment #2

Date: 10/30/2021

Subject: 3rd Congressional District Veterans Commendation Ceremony

Assessment:

This week was the second meeting for the 2021-2022 Van Taylor Congressional Youth Advisory Council. While I missed the first meeting which was a round table question and answer session with Representative Van Taylor himself, this meeting was more of an observational opportunity because we got the chance to sit and observe the annual Third Congressional District Veterans Commendation Ceremony. This ceremony is used as a way to express gratitude to local veterans in the Third congressional district who have sacrificed to protect and serve this country. This year there were fifteen veterans who were awarded a commendation. The ceremony also featured a guest speaker of Rep. Brian Mast, from the Eighteenth Congressional District of Florida as well as award presentations by the five different members of the commendation selection council.

To start out the ceremony we were addressed by the president of the Collin College campus who gave some brief backstory to the ceremony and what it represents. The Congressional Veteran Commendation works with the Veterans History Project and was created to honor different veterans of Texas' third Congressional District and to preserve their stories for future generations of Americans by highlighting not only their contributions during service but also their outstanding accomplishments within their communities following their service. This would include serving in any branch of the U.S. military and then starting a community organization, raising money for different groups, charity projects, etc. This year's fifteen awardees all came from a diverse background of accomplishments service which made for a very interesting presentation of each veteran's background and stories.

Secondly, Rep. Van Taylor took to the stage to express his thanks to all the veterans in attendance as well as briefly explain his period of service and then introduce Rep. Brian Mast. Rep. Taylor served in the Marine Corps following graduation from Harvard and went on to serve for several years before getting deployed to Iraq where he fought with the 2nd Force Reconnaissance Company where he led the first platoon into Iraq for his brigade and a mission that rescued 31 Marines during the pitched Battle of An Nasiriyah. He was then awarded the Combat Action Ribbon, Presidential Unit Citation, and the Navy Commendation Medal with "V" for valor.

Thirdly, Rep. Mast took to the podium where he recounted his service. Rep. Mast served in the U.S. Army for over twelve years. While deployed in Afghanistan, he worked as a bomb disposal expert under the elite Joint Special Operations Command, where he suffered extreme injuries from the detonation of an improvised explosive device, or IED, which resulted in the loss of both of his legs as well as his left index finger. Once he completed his service and recovery he earned medals including The Bronze Star Medal, The Army Commendation Medal for Valor, The Purple Heart Medal, and The Defense Meritorious Service Medal.

After the speeches given by both Reps. Taylor and Mast introduced the CVC selection board which is made up of five veterans who were elected by their peers and fellow veterans who have been awarded the commendation. This board of individuals reviews all nominee applications and selects the ones they deem as most deserving. Following the board's introduction, the actual ceremony began in which each member of the selection board took to the podium to recount the experiences and accomplishments of each nominee before calling them up to the stage to be given the actual commendation by Rep. Taylor.

Following the completion of the ceremony, the members of the Congressional Youth Advisory Council were called up to speak to some of the veterans as well as Reps. Taylor and Mast. I got to speak briefly with one of the award recipients Mr. Matt Foster who was a member of the U.S. Army. He also happened to be a friend of Mr. Lee, my mentor from last year because Mr. Foster is the Director of External Affairs at AT&T where he does many of the same duties as Mr. Lee over at the Frisco chamber of commerce.

In conclusion, I'm glad I got the opportunity to attend the ceremony and to hear all the amazing stories and sacrifices that the award recipients have made to protect and serve their country.