

State Representative Tom Tangretti

Remarks – YMCA Youth and Government Program

April 23, 2005

Good evening.

I'm very proud and pleased to be here with you tonight, and I just wanted to take a few moments to offer my thoughts on how important the YMCA Youth and Government Program is, why I am such a big supporter of it, and how fortunate I believe all of you are for having the opportunity to take advantage of what this program has to offer.

I already know that you are learning a lot about government through this program.

You're learning answer to questions such as: How does the American system of government work?

What do the three branches of government do?

How do men and women in this country turn their personal visions into political success, and public policy?

These are all important questions, and you are way ahead of many of your peers – and a good number of adult U.S. citizens, I might add -- for knowing the answers.

The YMCA Youth and Government Program has helped you find those answers.

But I hope that it has also done something else, and that is teach you how to do something with those answers.

That's the real test – taking what you have learned in this program and using it to introduce your friends, family, community and who knows, eventually the nation, to your own personal vision.

That's not always easy; usually the process comes with much failure.

History is rife with examples of people who failed several times in whatever they pursued – business, invention, career – before they succeeded, and that is especially true of government and politics.

But, as President Roosevelt once said: "Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs even though checkered by failure, than to rank by those poor spirits who neither enjoy nor suffer much because they live in the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat."

I certainly hope that the Youth and Government program has at least left you with the notion that it is never desirable to “live in that gray twilight,” and that when failure and frustration do come, you will be willing to try again -- to keep your dreams alive, and make them real.

Your experience in Youth and Government will not result in all of you wanting to run for office – or even work for the public sector.

But I do hope that it results in all of you wanting to be active, knowledgeable and conscientious citizens.

I believe this is a universal responsibility, especially here in the United States.

For those of you who do want to enter politics and public service -- I say welcome.

We need you.

But we need everyone else, as well.

I'm sure you've heard this said all the time: "Government cannot solve all of our problems," and that is true, it cannot.

Only when active, knowledgeable and conscientious citizens work with and through their government can we make headway on problems like the economy, school improvement, hunger and health care.

I guess what I'm saying is, my colleagues and I in Harrisburg cannot do it alone.

We need you, now and in the future, and that is one of the biggest reasons why I am such a fan and supporter of the YMCA Youth and Government program.

In many ways, these are difficult times for Pennsylvania, but I and a lot of other people across the state are genuinely working hard to make things better.

We are working on your behalf, but we will not be successful if you stand on the sidelines.

You must get involved.

If you want Pennsylvania youth to have not just an adequate education but a first-class education, you must get involved.

If you want every Pennsylvanian who graduates from high school or college to have a decent chance at a good-paying, satisfying and family-sustaining job, you must get involved.

If you want every Pennsylvanian to have access to the quality and affordable health care they need, you must get involved.

And if you want your children to someday grow up in a Pennsylvania as beautiful, clean, diverse and interesting as the Pennsylvania you are growing up in, you must get involved.

And believe, me, these days you can get involved.

When I was your age, government and the so-called experts possessed pretty much all the information.

Citizens often argued about policy after it was set, but the information and data that was used to create public policy was held and understood by few people.

That's not true anymore.

Virtually everyone, including young people like you, has access to the same information I do today ... and that is how it should be.

You should not have to rely on government officials to select some preferred outcome; rather, we should be relying on you to tell us what outcome you think is best.

Government and its citizens should not have separate and rigidly defined roles – the government leads while the people respond, or vice-versa.

Both government and citizens should have both roles – to lead and to respond -- and today's information society makes that possible.

I urge you to take advantage of that.

If you make the effort to lead, believe me, your public officials will make the effort to follow.

Your schools, your parents and community leaders, and the YMCA through this program, have given you the tools you need to speak passionately and wisely.

You now understand how to make your voices heard ... how to lead.

Use those tools and understanding so that, just as all of you have been active members of the YMCA Youth and Government Program, you remain active members of society at large.

The YMCA Youth and Government Program should be the beginning, not the end, of your interest in public service, in whatever form that service takes, and your commitment to your community and your fellow citizens.

A great Jewish sage once said: "If not now, when? And if not us, who?"

Those words are as true today as they were 2,100 years ago.

It is still up to each of us to act.

We are never too old, and we are never too young.

Once again, congratulations on your participation in this important and wonderful learning experience.

I hope that you enjoyed it, and I hope that you learned much from it – both about democracy and about what it means to be a citizen in a democracy.

I know that you will enjoy tonight's program, so I won't delay it any further.

But let me end by saying, sincerely, that I am looking forward to acting with all of you in the coming years to make our region, our state, our nation and our world a better place in which to live.