

# Can A Twenty-Two-Year-Old Medical Student Speak Up?

Category: Speaking Up

written by David Coulter | July 3, 2020

In 1970 I was a twenty-two-year-old first-year medical student riding down from New Haven with my classmates and our medical school dean to Washington, DC to join other medical students lobbying members of Congress to end the war in Vietnam. The organizers had arranged for us students to sleep on the floor of some dorm rooms at Georgetown University, which we did. (The dean, I am sure, did much better than that.)

We met with Senator Herman Talmadge of Georgia, an elderly, gracious conservative who kept a spittoon next to his desk. Obviously, we did not agree on anything, but at least he listened to us. Senator Ted Kennedy would not meet with us but he sent one of his staffers instead. The staffer was truly obnoxious and demeaning to us, so one of my classmates, a Jesuit priest, stood up and responded to him in Latin. The staffer was clearly upset and asked him to translate. The staffer then whimpered and left. Kennedy was not supportive.

My own personal congressman was Representative John Dingell from Michigan. He would only meet with his constituents, so he gave me an hour of his time in his office, just him and me, talking about the issues. I am still amazed that he spent so much time listening to a twenty-two-year-old medical student. We agreed on everything about the war but agreed to disagree on gun control.

I went back to sleep again on the floor of the non air-conditioned dorm at Georgetown before riding back with my classmates to New Haven the next day.

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