

LHS students had written passionate letters on debt

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By JAY FRIESS

When Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md., 5th) arrived Monday at Leonardtown High School to speak with students about the importance of fiscal responsibility, social studies teacher Mike Denny urged the students to show respect.

"At the end, you should give a standing ovation," Denny said, addressing a crowd of a few hundred government studies students who had come to hear Hoyer respond to letters a few of them had written to the congressman. "Whether you're Republican or Democrat, stand up. ... When he comes in, you all clap."

And they did.

Denny's call for civility contrasted some of the passionate letters Hoyer said he received from the students, which he quoted as calling the federal government's recent spending habits "immoral" and "intellectually bankrupt."

Denny quizzed the students on which districts Hoyer, and his adviser, Del. John Bohanan (D-St. Mary's), represent. The students answered correctly in unison.

"They probably rehearsed that," Bohanan said wryly.

"Nah!" Hoyer responded with a laugh. Looking at Denny, Hoyer said, "I know your grades will not be dependent on your response."

Denny later explained that the students were not required to write their letters, and that it was Hoyer who asked to come address the students. Hoyer praised the students who wrote to him and spoke their minds.

"I think hostility is appropriate," Hoyer said, noting that when he took office 30 years ago, the federal debt was \$985 billion. It has since ballooned 1,472 percent to \$14.5 trillion.

"We have done a lot of things over the last decade that we haven't paid for," Hoyer acknowledged, noting the Medicare prescription drug benefit and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. "These wars have cost us \$1.3 trillion ... all of which you will be paying for. ... We now face the consequences for these actions."

Hoyer asked for a show of hands of how many students favored raising the federal debt ceiling. Only seven students responded.

"That's representative of our general population," Hoyer said. He then asserted that raising the debt limit was necessary to pay for obligations the country already owes to veterans and seniors.

"How many people think the United States should waltz on its debt?" Hoyer asked rhetorically. "It would have direct, immediate consequences for expenditures."

Hoyer admitted that members of Congress have been guilty of running up spending in an effort to bring home improvements for their districts. He urged the students to apply pressure to curb spending.

"You need to be animated, active and angry," Hoyer said. He noted that his parents' generation is often called the Greatest Generation. Of his own Baby Boomer generation, Hoyer said, "Our generation has the risk of being called the greediest, most irresponsible generation."

Hoyer answered several student questions on China's rising influence, alternative energy, infrastructural decay and terrorism. However, senior class president Nichole Doster asked the most locally specific question, inquiring about the future of job security at Patuxent River Naval Air Station.

"We are going to have to have cuts," Hoyer said of military spending, but noted that Pax River is in a unique position with its testing function. "We do something that's basic to being the best no matter how big a force we have."

Hoyer thanked the students for their "really incisive" questions, but warned, "Do not fall into the trap of believing there are easy answers." When Hoyer finished speaking, the students rose and applauded.