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Inspire Award Essay 2016-17

Reflecting upon my voter registration efforts of this Inspired Year, I have grown passionate about youth civic engagement and accredit my success as an Inspired Leader to this passion. I have grown from a biased onlooker to a well-rounded leader, and I know that Inspire Kentucky is implemental in this change.

There are three main keys to success in the process. The most important key to success is to have passion and to truly care about youth voter turnout and registration. The ultimate incentive is the satisfaction of knowing that you made a difference in your local community, and it would never be possible without care and passion for the future of young people in our state.

Secondly, one MUST set a goal and constantly strive to exceed it. Our goal is to register at minimum the 492 students that make up our senior class. It is always a number that is in my mind that I am trying to surpass. I use my passion for the democratic process as inspiration to meet my goal.

The third key is a secret goal that I made to myself when planning out our voter registration drives; to have a conversation with each and every person I want to register. By doing this, I am demonstrating to them that exercising their right to vote has enough of an importance that I am taking time to personally talk to them about it.

The main challenge that we faced this year was getting our classmates to genuinely care about registering to vote. We thought about ways to engage the students, and came up with the crazy idea of going to all junior and senior English classes to register all eligible students. My partner and I first spoke to all of the English teachers to lay out a schedule for the week following. We

explained to them what one needs to register to vote (including the necessary files such as SSN, DOB, name, address, etc.). Then we publicized the upcoming Voter Registration Week through announcements and posters. During Voter Registration Week, my colleague and I visited all of the English classes, registering 336 students total. While that is a substantial number, we are now developing a survey to map out who have already registered. Although this process was quite a challenge, it will hopefully allow us to surpass our goal of 100% registration of the senior class and will encourage many students to become civically engaged.

Although the year is coming to a conclusion, there is little time to stop working toward my personal goal of 100% registration of eligible voters in our senior class. The final phase of registration will include distribution of a survey to all seniors so that we may conclude who is registered. I feel confident that I will surpass my voter registration goals. As the famous Brazilian soccer player Edson “Pele” Arantes once said, *“Success is no accident. It is hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrifice and most of all, love of what you are doing or learning to do.”* My partner and I have put in a great deal of hard work; we have persevered; we have learned from others; we have studied; we have sacrificed many hours; and, most of all, we have learned to love what we are doing.

This experience will have lasting affects for me, whether it is an influence for my future career, or simply by inspiring me to motivate others to exercise their right to vote. Because of my voter registration efforts and recognition from Inspire Kentucky, I have been accepted into an internship position with the Secretary of State’s Office in Frankfort, Kentucky for the 2017-2018 school year. Inspire has also changed my outlook on politics. Before this year, it was either my way or the highway. However, now I am founding a nonpartisan club called Young Americans, which will allow young people to have political discussions across party lines and to unify

through community-work. Ultimately, I know that my passion and efforts in this process will have a lasting impact on me and my community.