

If you could have dinner with one prominent Washington, D.C. figure, whether from the present or past, who would that person be and why? What would you ask them?

As an American yourself, what qualities of a man or woman would lead you to believe that they are a true, patriotic American? I think most people's answer to that would have something to do with bravery, respect and responsibility. This is why, if I were to sit down for dinner with any past or present Washington, D.C. figure, it would be Ryan Zinke. Because of his Montana roots, his bravery, and his willingness to serve others, Mr. Zinke represents everything that a citizen of the United States should be.

Born a fifth generation Montanan, Mr. Zinke knows a thing or two about his home country and the standards it beholds. Coming from a blue-collar family, Ryan learned respect and hard work from the get-go. His dad, Ray Dale Zinke, was a plumber, and his mother, Jean Montana Harlow Peterson, worked in real estate. It's safe to say they raised him the right way. He was actively involved in high school and college academics and athletics while growing up, and he learned the value of important qualities such as greater responsibility, accountability, leadership and future success. These qualities are ones I also value as I look to build relationships and opportunities for my future.

Not only is Mr. Zinke a respectful man, he is as brave as it gets when it comes to risk and sacrifice. A vast reason for my selection of Mr. Zinke has to do with him being a former Navy Seal of 22 years. Life as a Seal is one of the most physically and mentally challenging jobs known to man. Someone who is able to not only meet those difficult requirements, but to also succeed and lead others for the good of our country is a true hero to me. I would enjoy listening to his most memorable and most difficult memories in his travels around the world protecting our country. Those conversations would help me gain a greater perspective of how fortunate United States citizens are to have dedicated military personnel protecting and leading our country. After a long military career, Mr. Zinke retired in 2008 at the rank of Commander, another huge accomplishment. A man that is willing to put his own life on the line to protect the life of others, is a man that I would be proud to have dinner with.

After his military retirement, Mr. Zinke continued to dedicate his life to serving others in various capacities in the Montana and Federal legislature. He made me proud when he became the first Montanan selected to serve in the Presidential Cabinet, as Secretary of the Interior. I feel this shows that no matter where a person comes from, anything is possible with hard work and dedication. Mr. Zinke currently serves as a U.S. representative for Montana's first congressional district. It amazes me that after all he has accomplished, he still feels the responsibility of helping to lead our nation. Being a politician has to be challenging, yet he remains strong in his own beliefs and strives to make Montana and our nation a better place day after day.

If I were blessed enough to have a dinner with Mr. Zinke, in addition to learning about his military and political experiences, I would ask him a question that pertains to his life, and how I may pattern my own life. I would ask, "How can current and future Montanans protect and carry on the ways and traditions of rural Montana farms and ranches?" I would love to ask him this question because I, myself, am working to ensure the longevity of my own family's farm and ranch, which is becoming more and more difficult as years go by. I love to spend my summers helping my dad and grandpa with all the work that needs to be done, as well as enjoying the outdoors and rural way of life, and that allows me to see and understand their dedication to hard work and sacrifice. As a proud 4.0 student participating in three sports while also involved in various clubs and organizations in my community, I am determined to put forth my best effort in everything I do. I feel it is important to do everything I can to help ensure that one day I will be a respected adult helping my community thrive, and a successful 5th generation leader of a small-town Montana farm and ranch. The advice that I could receive from Mr. Zinke would be invaluable in helping me pursue these dreams of mine.

Ultimately, I believe Ryan Zinke has the qualities every American citizen should strive for. Not only is he a son, a father and a husband, he is also a former Navy Seal, a former Eagle Scout, and a current U.S. politician. There truly are only so many things a man can do with his life, and I believe Mr. Zinke has definitely made the most out of the opportunities that this world has presented to him. Because of these qualities, there is no doubt in my mind that if I had the opportunity to sit down for dinner with any past or present Washington D.C. figure, it would be Mr. Ryan Zinke.