

# LEADERSHIP IS NOT SELF-SERVING, BUT OTHER-SERVING

Remarks at a Reception Honoring the Memory of Sam Wilson  
Commonwealth Club, Richmond, VA  
February 6, 2019

Earlier today, the Virginia House of Delegates presented House Resolution No. 37, celebrating the life of Sam Wilson, to his wife, son, and a delegation from Hampden-Sydney College. Like so many members of the Greatest Generation, Sam Wilson not only fought for freedom and liberty in World War II, but he dedicated his life to serving the public interest, and later, to advancing Hampden-Sydney College's distinctive and noble mission of forming good men and good citizens. Throughout his long life, he not only served his country and shaped public policy, but he also served as an influential teacher and role model for generations of young men.

At every point in our country's history, we have depended upon individuals to answer a higher call to leadership when and where they have been needed most. What characterizes Sam Wilson's life—and the lives of so many others of his generation—is that he did so, unselfishly, repeatedly, and at critical moments. He heeded his country's call for servicemen to fight in World War II, and his experiences, including his underage enlistment in the U.S. Army and subsequent participation in Merrill's Marauders, are legendary. He then moved from the fire of World War II to the frying pan of the Cold War, serving his country in key military and diplomatic roles at several critical points in history.

After his return to civilian life, Sam Wilson began teaching at Hampden-Sydney where he developed a following of Hampden-Sydney men who eagerly welcomed his mentoring. In his classes, including a popular course on espionage, he regaled and captivated students with stories of his military and intelligence experiences. Then, in 1992, at a time when the College most needed stability in its leadership, he was called to serve as Hampden-Sydney's 22<sup>nd</sup> president. But, his contributions as president of Hampden-Sydney were far greater than providing stability. During his eight-year tenure, he did much to grow enrollment and to increase support for, and bring attention and credit to, the College. He also found time to teach Sunday School, after which his students would follow him home for "Miss Susi's" dinners, which included her famous biscuits and pies. Most importantly though, his service at Hampden-Sydney allowed him to be a mentor and role model for so many young men. The Wilson Center for Leadership in the Public Interest and the new Wilson Fellows Leadership Program at Hampden-Sydney not only bear his name, but they also bear witness to his belief that all leadership is fundamentally about serving others and that leadership should serve the public interest.

The most fitting way for us to honor Sam Wilson would be to commit ourselves to live up to, and into, the example he set for us and to champion character development alongside intellectual growth. We must teach young people well, but we must also instill in them a respect for others, a commitment to integrity, and a belief in human dignity, as well as an understanding that disagreements on substance should not preclude civility. Intellectual development is important, but we have seen many times in our society's history that intellect can be used for good as well as for ill. Only when intellect is channeled by character does our society advance. At Hampden-Sydney, we often say that we teach students not what to think, but how to think, and we do not stop there. We

remain focused on developing both intellect and character, so that we train principled leaders who will put others before self.

Most of you in this room know that each fall, we distribute to every new freshman a copy of our book, *To Manner Born, To Manners Bred*, written by 1969 graduate of the College, Tommy Shomo. We also have a longstanding tradition of greeting everyone we see on the Hampden-Sydney campus, not only fellow students and faculty and staff members, but everyone. We maintain these remarkable traditions to continually underscore for our students that kindness and consideration for others are essential components of character, that how we treat the people around us and how we conduct ourselves on a daily basis in small matters reflect the kind of character that will help us make the right choices in bigger moments. We also know that those who focus on others will be more likely to listen than to argue, to understand that compromise is a two-way street, and to know that true leadership is not self-serving, but other-serving.

For all who raise, mentor, and educate young people, the passing of such greats as our own Sam Wilson should encourage us to recommit ourselves to the qualities that made these leaders so deserving of our reverence, respect, and gratitude. He, and so many other members of the Greatest Generation, showed us that exemplary leadership rests on the bedrock of character and decency. Indeed, this is the most important lesson Sam Wilson gave to all of us who are—in one way or another—his students and his legacy.