

Teaching civic culture together

Cato Hosts Educators for Sphere Summit

Over four days in July, Cato hosted 150 teachers from grades 5–12 at the Institute's building in Washington, DC.

The summit was different from Cato's usual fare. While there was ample policy discussion from Cato scholars and honored guests, the overarching theme of the Sphere Summit was about something more fundamental than any particular policy goals. Instead, the event aimed to restore a spirit of civil, constructive, and respectful discourse and to return facts, analysis, and research to primacy as the vehicles for discussion and debate.

Cato believes that it is crucial to have a framework in which ideas can be discussed and policies debated respectfully, especially in times of partisan rancor and polarization. To that end, the Sphere Summit brought together educators from across the country to teach them about, and show them examples of, civic culture built around the free exchange of ideas.

The highlight of the summit was a dinner on Capitol Hill with Rep. Justin Amash (I-MI) and Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-CA). In a conversation with Cato's director of government affairs Jeff Vanderslice, the Michigan libertarian and California progressive discussed how they've been able to work together across the aisle to find shared goals and to move the ball forward with concrete legislative proposals. Congress has not been immune from spiraling hyperpartisanship, and both representatives outlined a desire for a more open and constructive process.

Educators also heard from philanthropist and former *Washington Post* publisher Donald E. Graham, who was interviewed by Cato president Peter Goettler; championship poker player and author Annie Duke; *National Review* senior editor Ramesh Ponnuru; former ACLU president Nadine Strossen;



Top left: HAYNE YOON, director of government affairs at the Vera Institute of Justice, discussing criminal justice reform. Top right: NADINE STROSSEN, former president of the American Civil Liberties Union. Bottom: Cato President PETER GOETTLER speaks to attendees during dinner.

Wall Street Journal editorial board member Jason L. Riley; and scholars from the Brookings Institution, National Constitution Center, Center for American Progress, and the Economic Policy Institute, among others. By bringing together a cross-ideological

gathering from left, right, and center, Cato hoped not only to spur talk about civic discourse but to demonstrate constructive discussion about policy issues.

Feedback from attendees was overwhelmingly positive. One wrote, "This ex-



Summit attendees took part in several events and workshops, including the closing dinner on Capitol Hill (bottom right) with REP. ZOE LOFGREN (D-CA) and REP. JUSTIN AMASH (I-MI), moderated by Cato's JEFF VANDERSLICE.

perience has changed my life. I am much more aware of what my friends, colleagues, and family are saying in person and on social media . . . I cannot summarize in a few sentences the profound ways this summit changed my mind, encouraged my heart,

and renewed my enthusiasm for education and my role in it." Another said, "The Sphere Summit was phenomenal. It was the best professional development that I have ever participated in as an educator." One especially heartwarming note read, "By far the

best event I have ever attended. The immense knowledge I gained will be passed on to my students (and anyone who will listen); on average 200–220 students a year. Thank you for treating teachers in a professional, respectful way." ■