

## Freedom of Speech: Not Taken Lightly

Social media has become a place where people often hide behind screennames and anonymity to say things that would be harder to say in person. Over time, this seems to have created a culture where people say things in person that are hurtful and destructive. My parents have raised me to be aware of my words and to use them carefully. They have also taught me the value of conversation and made me understand the sacrifice that so many men and women in uniform, like my father, are willing to pay in order that the freedom of speech is guaranteed for citizens of the United States.

One of the things I admire most about my dad is his firm belief that, even though there are those who do not agree with the work that he does in the military, they have the right to express those beliefs. He and my mom talk to me about how American history is different from other countries because it is filled with accounts of citizens having voices and using those voices to evoke change for the better. Without dissenting voices, often those changes take much longer and people are persecuted unfairly.

Our challenge for the future is to find a way to encourage people to use social media more responsibly so that voices are still heard, but in productive ways. Freedom of speech comes with the duty to accept the consequences of one's words, despite having the right to share opinions. Creating an environment where people understand that respect and the understanding that not everyone needs to agree for a conversation to take place is vital for Americans to continue growing with our country.

In a world where there are already so many different languages that can cause create varying translations, we must commit ourselves to choosing our words wisely, secure in the knowledge that we have the right to maintain our voices through our Constitutional right to freedom of speech.