

2017 ISH-DC Global Leadership Awards Tribute Dinner at the Residence of the British Ambassador On International Education

By Alex Beck, February 2018

Thank you, Cynthia, for that kind introduction, thank you Mr. Ambassador and Lady Darroch (“Derrick”) for hosting such an incredible evening, and hello to everyone gathered here tonight. As Cynthia mentioned, my name is Alex Beck and I’m currently a PhD student at the George Washington University (and formerly an intern at the Scottish Parliament). To those of you who don’t know me, I’m known around the International Student House as the American who only speaks English and who studies American politics. Now, to be fair, at one time I did study European politics before switching my academic focus, but at this point I’m pretty sure they haven’t kicked me out of the House due to my enduring love of world football and the one-and-only Liverpool Football Club. Alas, I’m not here before you tonight to discuss how Arsenal *somehow* managed to sign Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang without Champions League Football: I am here, rather, to talk about the importance of international education.

You don’t need a PhD in political science to see that the world is currently experiencing some “growing pains”: instantaneous communications have intertwined our economies, consumer aviation has empowered individuals to travel anywhere in the world in a matter of hours, and the internet has allowed me the ability to live-stream Liverpool’s preseason matches in Australia. Yet, all the while, many of our fellow countrymen and women lack access to these 21st century amenities, finding themselves unsure about their futures. These parallel trends are felt just as surely in the English Midlands as they are in the American Midwest.

While many governments continue to turn away from the international community in the face of these challenges, however, organizations such as the International Student House have become vital in bridging the gap between disparate peoples and cultures.

As a resident of ISH for nearly two years, I can say with confidence that it is a forum for international exchange unlike any other that I have experienced previously. This Saturday morning at breakfast, for example, I had a discussion with a German student, two French interns, and a Swedish doctor about the role of the EU, and commonalities between the party politics of Europe and the United States. At dinner, I often find myself discussing alternative development strategies with my friends from South Sudan, Nigeria, or India, or potential dissertation topics with a visiting scholar from King’s College in the United Kingdom.

Although these serious conversations about the challenges we hope to address in our future careers certainly sound good in a room full of benefactors and dignitaries, what I find most moving about the International Student House is that I often just think of it as a *student* house. Sometimes, I genuinely forget that the person next to me is from Israel, or Mongolia, or Venezuela, because at the end of the day we’re a lot more similar than we are different. Ultimately, we’re friends who are driven by a common purpose, and a common desire to fix

some of the injustices we have encountered along our paths. It is this sense of *commonality* that motivates us to find common ground, to fight common fights... and to share a common beer or two on the weekend. That is why I choose to live at the International Student House: because it shows me, each and every day, that there are good people from across the globe motivated by the same things that motivate me to pursue a life of public service.

As one of the lucky few Americans at ISH, I revel in this international engagement. At this point in my country's history, it is critically important that we demonstrate to the global community that the United States and its people still care deeply about the state of the world. That we still stand in wonder of cultures that stretch thousands of years into the past. That we still appreciate difference. That we can even come around to the *real* football. The International Student House is channeling ambitious young people from dozens of nations to confront their common challenges together, in a sense of collaboration and friendship. It is this approach to international education that makes our very own "UN of Dupont Circle" the exemplary organization that it is, in a world which needs international understanding now more than ever.

I will end tonight with a quote from one of my former housemates, Anna Michel of Germany, which sums up the feelings of many residents well. She writes: "Before I traveled to the US, I was feeling truly hopeless. I [had] been afraid about our future... [but] meeting you [the residents of the International Student House] has changed my world... Meeting you has given me hope... [because I see there are] people who fight in every corner of this world to make it a better place."

Thank you and have a lovely evening.