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CIA Official Brings September 11 Report To Life for Engadine High

By Stephen Underwood

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After reading the government's lengthy and challenging 9/11 Commission Report in an 11th grade American Literature class, students at Engadine High School were treated to a first-hand account when a Central Intelligence Agency officer visited their school to speak about his work as senior counsel on the 9/11 Commission.

Michael Hurley of Falls Church, Virginia, operations officer in the CIA's Directorate of Operations and now deputy and senior director of the 9/11 Public Discourse Project, was a guest of American Literature teacher Lawrence Frank and Principal Stu Hobbs Friday, April 29. He spoke to the classes who read the report and also at a general assembly of all seventh through twelfth grade students, plus a contingent from Newberry High School.

Mr. Hurley was a senior counsel on the 9/11 Commission's staff and also directed its counterterrorism policy investigation. After the terrorist attacks on the United States September 11, 2001, he volunteered to work in the CIA's counterterrorist center and to deploy to Afghanistan. He served three tours there and was one of the lead coordinators on the ground of Operation Anaconda, the largest battle against al-Qaeda in that country.

In the course of the 9/11 Commission's investigation, Mr. Hurley led a team that interviewed more than 150 officials and reviewed hundreds of thousands of pages of sensitive documents. His team led the organization of the March 2003 public hearings of the highest level officials of the Clinton and Bush administrations and drafted substantial portions of the policy chapters of the final report.

At Engadine, Mr. Hurley shared information about the attacks, terrorism, the government's response, and the commission's work, while at the same time motivating students to take an active interest in their government, either as a career or as citizens.

First he talked about how the 9/11 attacks should not have been surprising, given the smaller attacks that took place around the world before, as well as how different agencies responded,

He then thanked the students who have relatives in the military for the sacrifices they and their families have made.

"We have people in the Army, Navy, and Air Force that are 18 to 20 years old," he told the students. "They're the ones protecting us, and they're just a little bit older than you.

"We have responsibilities as American citizens," he added, "and we need people to serve in the state department, the CIA, and other agencies. But whatever you do, it's important to be engaged in what's going on in government."

Mr. Hurley humanized the government, saying everyone makes mistakes, that the government is "composed of people like us," and "the federal government does not have a monopoly on great ideas."

He also illustrated how individuals can make a difference, including the passengers on Flight 93 who helped prevent one of the hijacked planes from crashing into the White House or U.S. Capitol, and the victims' families who put pressure on the government to investigate the attacks.

Students and faculty at Engadine were surprised and honored that such a high ranking commission official came to their school.

"I think we were the only junior class in the country to make the 9/11 Report mandatory reading," said 11th grade student Paul Converse. "To have this guy here, who was part of the group who did it, was great."

Mr. Frank had decided last August that he was going to make the report part of his curriculum. After school started, he contacted the 9/11 Public Discourse Project to see if a representative of the commission could come to Engadine.

"I think kids out there have a lot of misinformation and there are conspiracy theories that are a lot of bunk," he said. "So it was a great opportunity to have this book to read.

"It's important for the kids to understand this is their government and they need to be informed," he added. "We finally worked out a schedule for Mr. Hurley to come. We were one of the first high schools that contacted him."