

These past few weeks, I have spent a profound amount of time reflecting on Washington Week. Now, upon being presented with the assignment of limiting my thoughts on the experience to a mere two pages, I am bestowed with the daunting task of finding where to begin. Perhaps I shall begin with a quote, however cliché that may be. *“There is a debt of service due from every man to his country, proportioned to the bounties which nature and fortune have measured to him” (Thomas Jefferson)*. This statement should be familiar to all delegates as it welcomes all those who enter the USSYP Website. Before the trip to Washington D.C, I overlooked the quote as a banal method of filling up blank space; plus, I would consistently and excitedly skip to the program overview and past agendas. However, upon return, I found myself longing for any connection back to the program. I spent countless hours scanning through the website, looking at trip photos, and conversing with my fellow delegates. During one of these USSYP internet surfs, I stumbled on this formerly neglected quote. Once ignored and overlooked, the statement now repeatedly plays itself over and over again.

With every free moment, I concurrently think of both the incredible experience and Thomas Jefferson's wise words. The United States Senate Youth Program was undoubtedly the greatest opportunity I have ever been presented with. Whether it was the chance to meet with such intelligent and motivated students, hear major policy addresses from our nation's leaders, or tour the fantastic city of Washington, D.C, I will be forever grateful to The Hearst Foundations and the USSYP. It is only now, reflecting back on the experience, that I have become to apprehend the massive debt I owe to the United States. I'll admit that before the program, I was hesitantly considering a career in public service; while I worked ardently for my schools' student government and Model U.N team and kept up with current events, I had not considered that perhaps my passion for government on such small a scale, could augment, like it did, to a desire to work in Washington, D.C. Now, I can excogitate nothing other than serving the nation that has offered me so much.

Among the numerous truly remarkable speakers we had the pleasure of listening to; three stand out in my mind: President Barack Obama, Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and Founder and CEO of C-SPAN, Brian Lamb. I will never forget Wednesday, March 11th, the day I stood outside the White House, awestruck by the presence of President Obama. From his informative answers and witty replies to his charismatic character and his commitment to shaking the hand of every delegate, I will always cherish that Wednesday afternoon. The very presence of Justice Ginsburg, gave me goose bumps. Her love for the judicial system and patriotism towards her country were palpable, two minutes into her speech. Although recovering from surgery, she managed to stand and take our questions for close to an hour. I was honored by her presence and found her words to be both enlightening and inspiring.

Towards the end of his address, Brian Lamb summarized my feelings towards the whole experience, in just one word. Lamb encouraged us to be humble, saying that humility was one of the most important character traits for us to obtain as delegates. The United States Senate Youth Program was a humbling experience. Whether it was the incredibly intelligent student delegates or the speakers of such high caliber, I feel humbled to have been in their presence. I went to Washington, D.C, a successful yet politically naive, suburban teenager and returned an enlightened yet humbled New York State Youth Senator, with a desire to passionately serve the United States.

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