

The United States Senate Youth Program was introduced to me as “simply another scholarship.” Applicants had to meet certain requirements, like any other scholarship. Résumés were imperative, like any other scholarship. An essay was mandatory, like any other scholarship. So, I completed the obligatory tasks with the hope I might win, like all other scholarships. Luckily my naïveté did not hinder my chances, and luckily my chances led to the absolute greatest week of my life....

Undoubtedly, the most rewarding experience was the constant interaction with 103 other bright, involved, and motivated students. Whether the topic of discussion was how political ideologies are shifting because of globalization, Aldous Huxley’s intent behind the conclusion of *Brave New World*, or the jokes Alaskans play on unsuspecting tourists, the amount of educated conversation was as abundant and lavish as the meals provided to us throughout the week—which is really saying something! Although hopeful, never again do I expect to be in an environment where I can completely voice my personal opinions and not be bombarded by criticisms and complaints, but instead by polite opposition and debate. Thank you, fellow delegates.

To continue, albeit I am not all-knowing, I think it is safe to assume the staff of USSYP prides itself in the speakers attained for the delegates. Each and every person who presented to the group did an outstanding job. Despite the fact not all the speakers were assaulted like Michael Leiter and Brian Lamb, I am positive each speaker had a profound impact on at least one delegate. I am a living example of this statement. During lunch at the State Department, I spoke extensively with Ms. Billie Gross from the Bureau of Oceans, Environment, and Science. When telling family and friends about my trip, I refer to that particular lunch as my “revelation in the State Department.” Through my discussions with Ms. Gross, I garnered an intense passion to work in Foreign Service. Her first-hand account of working in the Department gave me an unparalleled view of the career, a view I hope to provide to someone else a few years down the road. Ms. Gross was not on the agenda, she did not have secretaries telling her she had time for only one more question; she was simply chatting, passing her knowledge as easily as she was passing the iced tea. I believe a program is a definite success when teenagers are being inspired all day long, whether from speaking with President Obama or Ms. Billie Gross.

When I think back to October, I picture myself filling out the USSYP application and it makes me sick; sick because I took the program for granted. I saw Washington Week as a pleasant formality to receiving a \$5,000 scholarship. I now realize the absolute opposite is true. Washington Week changed my life, perspective, and aspirations. It instilled in me a sense of fiery patriotism for my country—a patriotic duty I seek to fulfill not by hanging flags or saying the Pledge of Allegiance every day, but by serving the public. I will strive to become that perfect politician who is uncorrupt, faithful to his constituents, and willing to take a stand for what is right. I believe the United States Senate created this program to ensure responsible leadership in the future—I believe they have done just that.

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