

A Week of Inspiration

I've often thought that freedom was dead--that reason had long since left the minds of a nation of sheep. Seven days at the Mayflower Hotel thoroughly convinced me otherwise. It served as a haven for unparalleled efficacy and unfettered brilliance, an intellectual's dream all brought together thanks to the 47th Annual United States Senate Youth Program.

High school scholars from every stretch of the union convened to quell and dispel rumors of teenage apathy. No longer could we heed the popular words of a wise John Mayer and "Keep waiting on the world to change." Senate Youth gave us the gift of knowledge, a gift that we will use throughout our lives as we venture to change the world. Each minute during Washington Week offered a new opportunity to delve into a new, unseen world of thought. I shared political theory with the bleeding liberals and the staunch conservatives.

The sheer depth and intelligence of the delegates was matched by the unbelievable wisdom and experience of the speakers. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg graciously shared her thoughts of law, and justice, and the Constitution--thoughts that captivated us as an audience from the moment she stepped to the podium. Michael Leiter of the Counterterrorism Center shed light on the unknowns of the war on terror. Countless other distinguished and honorable men and women took to the stage throughout the week with each bringing his own unique perspective on the ways of our world.

In an age in which too many politicians seem as only impersonal, floating heads on the evening news, our week held an astonishing treat that even we could hardly fathom. Newly inaugurated President Barack Obama humbly welcomed us to the White House, a moment that few Americans may ever realize. He spoke of life as President, of policy, and of his helicopter. But what held the greatest importance for myself came not as a greeting of words, but rather from a shaking of hands. As the leader of the free world made a point to shake every delegates' hand, I truly realized the importance of our time with him. He was

taking his time to grow the new generation of leaders--one of whom may be shaking hands with future delegates one day.

Despite the wide array of phenomenally important people I met and questioned in Washington, the most prized gift that Senate Youth gave me is the notion that our future is not bleak as many would have us believe. If anything, the fire of liberty burned more fervently between the 104 delegates than I could have ever imagined. We represented every segment of society, every culture imaginable, every belief conceived. Yet we united in the belief of an America crafted over two centuries ago. A belief that no force in the world can overcome the might of a people free.

If we learned anything from Senate Youth Program, it is that we have the power to make of our lives whatever we may dream. Never lose sight. Senate seats and judicial benches are opening up constantly. Which one of us will take the challenge and defend our dissension? For as Thomas Jefferson wrote, "Dissent is the highest form of patriotism."

I believe in this cause of freedom. It engages me more than any idea in human history, for it is an idea that gives every man true life. Life is nothing if it is not free. Today and tomorrow we shall face countless battles in defense of liberty. But I am not afraid. I am not afraid because I have seen who will be leading this cause. And let it be known that our generation will not stand idly by.

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