

Christian Escalante, AK - 2015

Asking 104 USSYP delegates to reflect on their time in Washington, D.C. through the U.S. Senate Youth Program (USSYP) is a tall order, because there will never be an account accurate enough to shed light on the greatness of USSYP. Nevertheless, here I am, giving my tribute to Washington Week and the amazing opportunity given to me by the Hearst Foundations, the Department of Defense (DoD), and the U.S. Senate.

I could not go to Washington, D.C. on my own time and recreate the week I had with the teen leaders of America. I use the term "teen" leaders very loosely because truly, the delegates of USSYP 2015 were on par with some of the leaders that we have today; we are just as motivated, compassionate, and skilled as those who are working to create a better America today.

So, as amazing as meeting President Obama, Justice Breyer, and Senators Murkowski and Sullivan was, the highlight of my week was the delegates. They opened my eyes to the myriad of ways that I could help others right now, not a few years away. These delegates were from all walks of life, and this is because public service and leadership transcends socio-economic standing, religion, race, and sexual orientation. They showed that there is not one type of leader. Let me tell you, over half of the delegates want to be president, but the other half didn't and they want to follow worthy career paths, such as enlisting in the military and working with foreign nations, humanitarian organizations, or medicine.

I mean seriously, my fellow delegates have started their own charities and non-profits, are student body presidents, girls and boys nation senators and representatives, valedictorians, and just overall great citizens. There are very few people who inspire me more than my own peers. In fact, they have inspired me so much that I have decided to go into elementary and junior and senior high classrooms to talk to students about USSYP and the endless opportunities they have in high school and in the community around them. Because, truly, my biggest takeaway from the week in D.C. is that people want you to succeed. The Hearst Foundations, the U.S. Senate, DoD, USSYP staff, and so many others are rooting for us.

We are the generation of change, and I truly believe that if we continue to put others before ourselves, then we can create positive change in the world. The senators, justices, the president, and the other notable speakers are counting on us to carry on the work that they are doing and that is what inspired me. They expect us to change the world, and from the sample of youth that I met in D.C., I *know* that we can.

What I am trying to say is that we are an impressive bunch, and you should be as awed as I am; not only because we will be the leaders of tomorrow, but also because we are already the leaders of today. I am also glad that our generation is the generation of technology, because I can continue to create and strengthen the friendships I made during Washington Week. I can stay connected and updated on their endeavors and plan summer vacations and future presidential campaigns.

Apart from my inspiring peers, the U.S. Senate Youth Program opened my eyes to what public service truly means. I have always been passionate about helping others in any way I can, and USSYP introduced me to a variety of ways to do that. I could be an elected or nonelected public official, I could work for a nongovernmental humanitarian organization, or I can get involved with media. Public service is such an open-ended career path that we are all able to integrate our passions with helping others, which is what I am sure that most of us will do.

From the peppered bacon and dance parties in the Colonial Room, to meeting the leaders of our country and getting an inside look of our nation's capital, all I can conclusively say is that USSYP is unforgettable. Because of the U.S. Senate Youth Program, I now have a couch or two to crash on in every state, and even Korea. I am more aware of what goes on in the federal government and what it takes to be an active and aware citizen. I understand what public service means on a deeper and more personal level. And lastly, I have a network of awe-inspiring students around the country. Thank you to sponsors of the U.S. Senate Program, the Hearst Foundations, the U.S. Senate, and the Department of Defense for providing us with this opportunity and for allowing me to be part of one of the most powerful alumni association.

There is not much else I can say about the 53<sup>rd</sup> annual U.S. Senate Youth Program other than I am awed and I have enough inspiration to a work for a lifetime. One day, when my fellow delegates become president, Cabinet members, Supreme Court justices, U.S. senators and representatives, and other world leaders, I will remember the week I spent with them in the Mayflower Hotel and I hope that they remember me as well.