

Joshua Hughes, IA – 2015

The United States Senate Youth Program is a special program. It's special because it brings together 104 of the most engaged, most intelligent students in the country. These students are not only honored with a week in Washington, D.C., called Washington Week, but they are also honored with a \$5,000 scholarship from the Hearst Foundations. That scholarship is especially special because there's no doubt that it provides some much needed financial aid to some students.

Washington Week was very special for me in a few specific ways. There are 104 delegates, and after meeting all of them at least for a brief conversation, I can say that my horizons and my perspective are much broader than ever before. It's easy for me to sit in rural Iowa and talk about immigration and urban development policy as an authoritative figure. However, delegates from states like Texas or New Mexico that live these issues have entirely different worldviews. It's easy to talk, but it's harder to listen. USSYP not only taught me how to be a better listener, it also taught when I should listen.

Furthermore, the impressive program that is presented to the delegates, in and of itself is conducive to empowerment and learning. Where else would a Supreme Court Justice speak candidly about the realities facing racial youth in America, or the lawmaking process? Getting to know national and global figures in an almost personal setting is once in a lifetime. We met President Obama and heard him speak frankly about his legacy- no press involved. I especially enjoyed hearing from the Secretary of the Senate, Ms. Julie Adams. Secretary Adams is a native of Iowa, so it was my honor to give thank you remarks, following her speech. Secretary Adams had good insight, and one thing I will take away, and forever remember is this: "Be nice to the people you meet on the way up, you'll meet them again on the way back down."

Lastly, USSYP taught me so many things. Besides widening perspectives and general life rules, I learned some great information, such as:

- Being stuck on a broken down bus really brings people together,
- A little manipulation and use of stairwells, and you can stay out well past curfew,
- People are generally shorter than their Facebook profiles would have you believe,
- East Coast types value a vinaigrette over ranch on a salad, much to the disdain of this Midwesterner,
- If you don't run a non-profit as a high school student, you might be in the minority in some USSYP settings, and most importantly,
- The brochure **never** tells you how hard it is to leave.

While most of my 'lessons' are a little facetious, the last is not. The cherry on top of the whole week was the people. To be completely fair, the people were more than just the cherry on top, they constituted the best part of the week- they were the whole sundae. Relationships are the glue that holds life together. There's certainly a little part of my heart that is now glued tight with the friends I have made from the United States Senate Youth Program. They will be with me forever, and that is something special.