

Beverly Brown, LA - 2015

It is true that if you are looking for it, you can find inspiration anywhere. At USSYP, inspiration is everywhere, without ever looking.

This great program was only a week long, but it felt as if I had been there my whole life. My mentor group instantly clicked under the leadership of our "Squad Mom," a/k/a Lieutenant Commander Toler, who was an awe-inspiring mentor. Throughout the week, I met 103 amazing delegates with diverse characteristics, ideas, and views, and I soaked up information from them about every topic imaginable during our extensive impromptu debates.

As USSYP delegates, we had the opportunity to meet with men and women who are currently shaping the world through all three branches of the government, NASA, an ambassadorship, Homeland Security, the media, and the World Bank. I hope to have the same opportunity one day to make such a positive impact. Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer was very candid with us about his interpretation of the Constitution and his views on many current issues, including same-sex marriage. Dr. Michelle Thaller, a NASA astronomer and likely one of the world's smartest people, gave us information about the U.S. space program, including details about reaching Pluto this summer, and Charles Bolden, Jr. provided information ranging from the NASA budget to Scott Kelly's March 26th lift off. I have been anticipating Scott Kelly's year-long mission and this unique experiment in which the changes to his body in space will be compared to his twin brother Mark's body on earth. This project will help us make advances in long term space travel, leading to future travel to Mars. Hearing Charles Bolden talk about this project less than two weeks before it began was something I will remember forever.

In addition to sharing information, ideas, and opinions, our speakers indirectly provided insight into their personalities. Dr. Jim Yong Kim, the President of the World Bank Group, explained the need to boost shared prosperity, how the World Bank and the World Health Organization work together, and the amazing fact that it is a realistic goal of the World Bank to end extreme poverty by 2030. He also said that his successful career was "a series of lucky accidents." The head of the World Bank attributed his position to *serendipity*. Dr. Kim set a good example for all of us, exemplifying how a powerful person can be very humble and genuinely nice. He didn't feel the need to assert his authority over us; he was approachable and treated us as if we were equals. I had the opportunity to give the appreciation speech after his talk which was just one of the once-in-a-lifetime opportunities USSYP provided to us. So not only did I get to hear him speak, but I was able to meet him before his speech. (During my appreciation speech he laughed at a joke I made and there is photo documentation!).

We also had the opportunity to meet our senators, and the Senate reception was not at all what I expected. We lined up behind our Military Mentors who formed a wall – which was definitely more necessary to protect the senators from us than us from anyone else. Behind the wall we eagerly awaited our senators and dropped everything when they arrived (literally dropped anything we were holding – food, drink, etc.). It was basically 104 teenagers fangirling over political figures. Enough said.

Meeting the president of the United States was an exciting and eye-opening experience. President Obama offered advice ("Don't worry about what you want to be; worry about what you want to do."), answered questions, and talked about current issues facing the United States and the world. While we lined up in height order to get on the risers for our picture, everyone was praying that their height would not fail them in this one important moment – the need to be as close to the President as possible. I was only two arm-lengths away! During the picture taking, I discovered that everyone really does do whatever the President tells them to do because when he said, "say cheese," everyone SAID CHEESE. He also quietly mentioned something about scooting in, and the move to the center was practically violent. I had trouble breathing. No matter your political affiliation, it was a wonderful experience to stand in a room with the President of this great nation.

Whether you call it inspiring, awe-inspiring, or inspirational, USSYP is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for 104 high school students who are sooo appreciative. Many, many thanks to the Hearst Foundations for providing this trip and the scholarship, to the Hearst family for traveling with us, to the USSYP staff for arranging everything, and to the Military Mentors who provided guidance and mentorship to all of us. I also want to thank my principal for recommending me, the Archdiocese of New Orleans for nominating me, and the Louisiana Department of Education for selecting me. Finally, I want to thank Mr. Joe Andragna, my AP U.S. History teacher, who taught me what seems like everything there is to know about U.S. history, and Dr. Bridgette O'Connor, my Big History teacher, who taught me that defensible opinions need to be based on facts.

I am proud to be an alumna of USSYP!