

William DiGravio, MA - 2015

For the longest time I had told myself that I would not become a coffee drinker. I wanted nothing to do with the stuff. So on the first day of USSYP when a 2014 delegate asked me if I was a coffee drinker, I knew that my avoidance was not going to last for long. After telling him no, he smiled and replied, "You will be." And right he was.

It was that seemingly endless need for coffee that is truly indicative of the experience that is the United States Senate Youth Program. From speaker to speaker, venue to venue, monument to monument, cup of coffee to cup of coffee, grew my excitement and appreciation for our week in Washington. When I received the call that I had been one of the Massachusetts delegates selected for the program, I was the most excited that I have ever been in my life. Now as I reflect back on that day, I realize that I did not in any sense truly grasp how special the journey I was about to embark on was.

Each day as we got on and off the buses during Washington Week, both my knowledge of government and desire to embark on a life of public service grew greater and greater. Hearing first hand from President Barack Obama what he believes the greatest challenges facing our generation are, and receiving advice on how best to tackle them, was a truly unforgettable experience. At USSYP speakers spoke about the importance of both the past and the future. From Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer who spoke of the variety of ways in which he and his fellow Justices use history and precedents to mold their view of the law, to NASA Administrator Charles Bolden who shared with us what in our lifetime we will see in technological and scientific advances both in space and on Earth.

However for me, some of the most memorable experience of Washington Week are the times spent in between hearing from speakers, visiting venues and monuments. It was the time spent on the bus rides, in our rooms, and at meals, spending time with people my own age who shared similar passions, goals, and ideals. Being around so many likeminded people was the most enjoyable part of USSYP, individuals who not only shared a passion for government, but also similar senses of humor. My fondest memory comes on the last night, when a group of us were sitting in my room and my roommate Brandon from Colorado confessed that he had been using my toothpaste all week. To which I replied that it was ok, as I had been taking pieces of his gum all week. I had noticed that my toothpaste was getting used at a rapid pace, and he that he had far less gum than he should. We were all on the floor laughing at these confessions.

And it is memories like these, combined with the extraordinary insight into the inner workings of our government, that made the United States Senate Youth Program the greatest and most memorable week of my life.