

Elijah Lutz, OH-2015

When I got off the plane at Reagan National Airport, I had absolutely no idea what kind of a week I was getting in to. My fellow Ohio delegate, Jacob Dretzka, and I had just walked past the checkpoint when a man in a Marine Corps service uniform flagged us down and escorted us to the baggage claim and the coach bus, where we waited anxiously to meet a stream of other delegates.

Almost immediately, I was blown back at the caliber of the conversation that was taking place: political polarization, controversial legislation, and the need for cooperation in government. I was in heaven! These are the type of people who love what I love! I bonded with those on the bus immediately, and I knew right there that these will be friends I would have for the rest of my life. We shared our collective feelings of nervousness and excitement, as I still had doubts about whether or not any of this is real.

When we arrived at the Mayflower, I knew it was real. The elegance and grandeur hit me faster than a bullet train the second I stepped in. The most gratifying thing that happened at my arrival, however, was meeting Lynn DeSmet and Rayne Guilford, and learning that they were in fact real people. For the remainder of this time, I socialized and mingled with other students who I realized were incredible and more than deserved to be here. The week officially kicked off that night, with Major Stephen Cox giving his first of many announcements with his golden voice proclaiming "Ladies and Gentlemen, may I have your attention please?"

The incredibly long and busy week flew by before I could even realize. By the second day, I lost all concept of time and went with the flow. The speakers were more than amazing, the tours and sights were far better than I could've imagined, and the friendships I was building only grew stronger and stronger. While some may say that the highlight of their week was meeting the president of the United States in the White House, mine was meeting and sitting three feet away from Justice Stephen Breyer of the Supreme Court. Hearing him talk about his job and his background only strengthens my desire to go into the field of law and hopefully serve on the Supreme Court like he does.

Though Justice Breyer was the highlight of my week, I most remember the speech given by Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia. The senator told us the story of his upbringing and his involvement in politics even at a fairly young age. He told us a quote given to him by his grandmother, which he applies to his everyday life: "People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care." To hear this come from a politician was intense. Oftentimes people will accuse all government officials of being selfish, but in reality they all aren't like that. This truly drove home the purpose and the concept of what public service really is, and what the true mission of the United States Senate Youth Program is.

Public service is a service to the people without any desire for self-gain. A person who goes into public service shouldn't have themselves at the top of their priority list, but society as a whole. Nearly every speaker had this one concept in common, despite their political affiliation, religious beliefs, position, or background. Each speaker made it very clear that you need to cast away your selfish desires to be effective in public service, and devote every action and moment to the overall betterment of society as a whole. That's what I want to do, and that is what I believe I should do with my life: make society better.

I wasn't alone in my belief. Every single one of the other 103 delegates shared my desire to serve the people to make this world a better place. Many of them have already done so much to reach this desire by forming non-profits in support of a cause, or volunteering a monumental amount of time and effort to a cause which is important to them. They all were incredibly smart, talented, devoted, and individually amazing. They taught me so much in a week, and inspired me to continue my quest to help others. Most of all, they taught me to never doubt myself ever again.

Many times throughout the week, I jokingly told others that "I don't know how or why I got picked to go" or "I definitely don't deserve to be here." But each time I was quickly told otherwise. Each person there deserved to be there in some way, shape, or form. Their contributions can be anything from starting organizations to help, writing a simple editorial in support of a cause, or just being kind to others on a daily basis. It didn't matter the size of the contribution, just as long as it was positive and good.

The other delegates by far were the most amazing people I have ever met, and I have the honor to call them my friends today. Some I even consider to be my best friends. I've never met a group of people who are so kind, and simply amazing. They truly are the future of this nation, and I am honored to consider myself among them. I want to thank the Hearst Foundations with all my heart and soul. You truly gave me the best week of my life, and it will impact me forever. I am forever grateful for the opportunity to have participated in such a wonderful event, headed by an even more amazing staff. I hope for many successful years to come!