

Reid Rubsam, OR – 2015

Almost a month ago, I boarded an airplane before sunrise for a trip that would eventually take me to our nation's capital. I felt both nervous and excited, with no idea what to expect. Looking back, I can only feel tremendously grateful to have been given the opportunity to attend the 2015 Washington Week Program, facilitated by the Hearst Foundations. This amazing trip has provided me with a wealth of new insight regarding the inner workings of the United States government, unforgettable experiences and relationships, and, most importantly, a better understanding of the myriad ways that I can live a life of public service.

Upon arrival at the Mayflower Hotel, I found a hive of riveting activity. Over one hundred students from across the country were gathered in a large ballroom, introducing themselves to their soon-to-be friends. I felt so welcomed and thrilled as I learned more about my fellow delegates, and by dinner, we were sharing stories about our favorite activities at school. Before dinner, however, we had the privilege of speaking with alumni of the United States Senate Youth Program, who provided advice to those interested in a variety of career fields.

After dinner, we were split into groups and assigned Military Mentors. Meeting and speaking with all of our Military Mentors over the course of the week was, in many ways, the most impactful part of the trip for me. Prior to this trip, I had never had a familiar relationship with a member of the armed forces, and was very much insulated as a result. Having the opportunity to talk to them more about their experiences, and simply about life, led to my profound appreciation for their service and character. They are truly role models of the highest caliber.

Because the entire week was both informative and exhilarating, I cannot virtuously attempt to list the most significant experiences I had without unintentionally leaving something out; however, there were several extremely meaningful moments that I'll always remember. One was the trip to Mount Vernon, and the wreath-laying ceremony held there. The natural beauty and historical significance of that place is enthralling, especially when entering Washington's home. Another major moment was hearing Senator Joe Manchin III speak. His perspective on the potentiality of human endeavors, and the impact those endeavors can make on the world, has changed my way of thinking, and encouraged me to be less timid when it comes to making a difference. As he said, "the worst thing that could happen is that you make a mistake... and a little bit of ridicule and criticism is a small price to pay if you know you can make a change." He went on to say that "the real worst thing that could happen is realizing that you could have made a change, [but didn't]."

Visiting the World Bank and hearing from its president, Jim Yong Kim, was another highlight of the week. It was fascinating to hear about the correlation between economic and societal health, and how purposeful philanthropy can improve both by giving citizens sustainable opportunities for growth. Hearing from Dr. Kim was one of my favorite experiences; it was an extremely educational visit. In addition to visiting the National Archives Rotunda, the last two most memorable experiences were the meetings with our senators and our meeting with the president of the United States. I was honored to shake hands with Senator Merkley, who answered our questions about Oregon's political challenges, and was honored to see so many other senators in attendance. I am very thankful for the efforts of the coordinators who contacted so many legislators to make this visit happen. Our time in the White House was just as, if not more, exciting. Out of all the public servants I met, President Obama stood out as the individual who most earnestly contemplated and answered our questions. Rather than political information, President Obama provided genuine advice on living purposeful lives, and urged us all to live a life of public service in some shape or form. I took his insights to heart, and am now emboldened to find genuine ways to improve my community.

That, in essence, was the most powerful thing I gained from this trip to Washington D.C. I was exposed to a wide array of American citizens who are making a difference in the world, and what I received from the United States Senate Youth Program was an empowering affirmation that I possess the capability to overcome barriers and help others as a leader, through hard work and principled conduct. For that affirmation, I am immensely grateful.