

Nathan Bonham, PA – 2015

Previous to my stay in Washington, D.C. on behalf of the Hearst Foundations and the USSYP program I was content with my decision to pursue a career in environmental engineering after high school, but after Washington Week I now have a desire not just to benefit society through science and mathematics but also through public service. Unlike many of the other delegates I do not plan on becoming a politician, lawyer, or economist; however, the reoccurring theme of public service displayed continuously during the program has instilled within me a desire to be both an engineer and a public servant in the future.

Every single speaker was inspiring, interesting, and very impressive, yet several stand out more clearly while looking back on the week. First, the presentation given by Mr. Charles Bolden at the NASA headquarters was my favorite. I was very surprised by the amount of planetary research that NASA completes, and the information Mr. Bolden told the delegates about the James Webb Space Telescope and NASA's goal to place humans on Mars in the 2030s was unbelievable. Finally, the administrator explained how the infamous Challenger Explosion was what inspired him to become a public servant, and this piece of information epitomizes the true impact Washington Week has had on me.

In addition to Mr. Bolden, I truly enjoyed meeting Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia. I have great appreciation for his upbringing in a rural area and his graduation from West Virginia University (where I will be attending college). When Mr. Manchin spoke to us his sincerity and interest in our generation was obvious, and his various bipartisan actions within the Senate are an excellent example of how our government needs to change in order to function fluidly.

Although I appreciated every speaker, the limited space in this essay demands that I reflect on meeting the president of the United States in the White House. 104 of the brightest and most confident students from around the globe stood together waiting to see the most powerful leader of the free world, but each one of us had probably never felt so nervous before as we did while we stood on the risers waiting. When President Obama entered the hallway and said hello, every delegate let out a nervous, cheesy laugh. We were all awed by the moment. Hearing live the iconic voice of President Obama that each of has heard countless times on television sent chills through me, and it is a memory that I am sure will never fade.

I will never forget the variety of speakers I was given the opportunity to learn from during Washington Week; likewise, all of the memorials, historical sites, and various other locations we visited are well imprinted in my mind. The Newseum was simply breathtaking with its floor of Pulitzer Prize winning photographs and its wall of 9/11 newspaper front pages. The Lincoln, Jefferson, Vietnam War, Korean War, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Martin Luther King Jr. memorials were also very impressive. Finally, visiting the Pentagon, Capitol Building, U.S. Supreme Court, Mt. Vernon, and the White House were prestigious honors that I am ecstatic I was granted the opportunity to do.

The entire week was an incredible honor. The Hearst Foundations and the USSYP program staff treated all of the delegates like royalty. We were given a behind-the-scenes tour of our nation's capital; moreover, the program brought 104 future leaders together to network and start building this nation's future. I don't know if any other program can say that. There is no way I can repay the Hearst Foundations for this gift, but I can show them this program is worth the efforts by working to benefit this country as a whole.