

Vance Vaughan, TX - 2015

“We are either going to come together and celebrate our likeness as globalization occurs or we will come more into conflict as a result of our differences.” (paraphrased statement from the president of the United States, President Barack Obama). In a way, this statement characterizes one of the pillars of my Senate Youth Program experience. The USSYP symbolized a microcosm that in many ways reflected the regional, racial, orientation varied, and – in short – diverse United States. My fellow delegates and future constituents ;), played a significant role in creating the remarkable atmosphere of this year’s Washington Week. Arguably one of the greatest aspects of my experience as a USSYP delegate was the level of intellectual and stimulating conversation I was able to have with my peers. Staying up late in the hallway discussing foreign current events, domestic politics, and attempting to solve the world’s problems are only a few issues I had the privilege to engage in. The amount I learned just from the delegates themselves is worth exulting. Moreover, the varied perspectives of the delegates taught me, in the words of Justice Bryer, “to be careful of being too rigid.” The differences we may have had never stopped us from sharing our views and forced us to have tough conversations on issues that our generation will be faced with. Through our passion for public service, our “likeness,” we grew as Americans but more importantly – we grew as people.

I would be remiss to not discuss the incomparable Military Mentors of this program who represent the leaders in their respective fields. The Military Mentors played a key role in the success of the 2015 Senate Youth Program. Coming from a background that lacks a military presence, I was enamored by the thought of getting to pick an armed serviceman/woman’s brain. Through conversations with various Military Mentors, I gained insight to what it’s like to put your life on the line for this country. I even learned about disputes like gender equality in the Marines and got real military perspectives on the use of drones in combat – issues I now have a firmer grasp on. However, it was my experience at Arlington National Cemetery that truly made me proud to now know people in the military and appreciate all that they do. Overall, I believe my experience wouldn’t have been the same without those remarkable individuals.

Additionally, the speakers of the week contributed greatly to my experience as a delegate. Specifically Justice Breyer, Vanita Gupta, and President Obama were among the most impactful speakers. Justice Breyer who spoke to some of the most controversial rulings in American history and Vanita Gupta who discussed racial profiling and its implications inspired me to pursue a career in law. President Obama discussed climate change and how it’s okay to have a different idea about how to solve the issue, but what’s not okay is to ignore the issue. All of the speakers during Washington Week spoke with a genuine passion for the work they’re doing; these distinguished public servants working for the greater good of the United States have instilled a desire in me to continue to pursue a life in public service. Thank you to the Hearst Foundations for this incredible opportunity. I look forward to applying what I’ve learned to a career as a public servant.