

Caleb Visser, VA – 2015

My train was late arriving at D.C.'s Union Station. I wrestled with nerves while pondering whether the awaiting USSYP staff would be frustrated with tardiness. Besides the few social media exchanges I experienced with other delegates, I was going into this program blind. Disembarking the train, I carried my suitcase of starched dress clothes and a kindling interest in public service. Little did I know that I'd board the train home in a week with an awakened sense of purpose accompanied with an emblazoned passion for politics.

The extravagance never stuttered from the time I checked in at the Mayflower Hotel until the time I checked out. The staff, military mentors and guest speakers were in one word, outstanding. Shuttling from each location in coaches, I found myself grabbing hold of the moment, wanting nothing more than for it to last forever. It seemed that the only things not moving at 100 miles per hour in D.C. were the coaches themselves in traffic. Surrounded by it, I couldn't believe it was real. Even now, I still can't comprehend that it really happened — that I experienced such a remarkable, jam-packed week!

I've struggled tremendously to write this. How can I do USSYP justice in a few paragraphs? How can I express the forged friendships in a series of sentences? How can I adequately summarize the best week of my life in a single page? I haven't come up with the answer, but I have come to the deadline, so I must try.

At the conclusion of each day, my Military Mentor's group and I would discuss it. Savoring every experience's details, we would ask what was the favorite? The National Achieves and Senator Isakson? The Supreme Court and Associate Justice Breyer? The White House and President Obama?

No group consensus could ever be reached, of course. However, this is not because it's Washington and agreements seem to be a rare occurrence these days. It is because literally everything was our favorite (especially the food). The speakers intricately revealed different contemporary issues with a unique perspective. They were the movers and shakers, not simply observers or critics. They believed in democracy. They believed in the power of the people. And most of all they believed in public service.

I particularly appreciated learning about international service through meeting with President Jim Yung Kim of the World Bank. His dedication to global human development was admirable, and his humility and laid back leadership style struck a chord in me.

Each speaker had something radiant about him or herself. For the majority of the week I couldn't quite pinpoint it. But by the end, I had finally nailed it. Each individual was filled with burgeoning passion. I recognized then that this was what I hoped to espouse returning to Virginia. I'm determined to stride in genuine pursuit of my passion; when people meet me, I want them to be attracted to that sense of sincere excitement I have about service.

Something is special about the way passion captivates the human conscious. Like fire, stoking its sparks ablaze takes the right ingredients. But once it catches, its brilliance cultivates into an incredible manifestation. My fellow delegates, the USSYP staff, Military Mentors and guest speakers were the igniting ingredients to my fire, and the Hearst Foundations and United States Senate were the conduits providing for it. I'm eternally indebted to them for this instrumental transformation.

The flames of passion serve as the foundation for humanity's progress. Nothing has exposed this truth more than my week at the United States Senate Youth Program. My heart overflows with hope for our country's future, and my head is confident that the global leaders of tomorrow are the USSYP friends I keep today.