

Monica Garcia, WA - 2015

A little over a month ago, I travelled to Washington, D.C., representing the beautiful Evergreen state of Washington at the 53rd annual United States Senate Youth Program. I remember waking up at 3:30am and arriving at the Mayflower Hotel at 4:00pm; that evening I joined 103 of the brightest students in the nation. Upon arrival, I was super nervous to meet all the other students but all negative feelings disappeared when I was kindly greeted by some of the sweetest people I've ever met. I still carry my USSYP journal in my backpack, whenever I decide to open it up again I immediately immerse myself in the feelings scribbled down on to each page. I find myself back at the Supreme Court, listening to the National Symphony or riding back to the hotel after meeting President Obama. The sights, the recorded quotes and the kind words of my fellow delegates on the last day are all the perfect stitches that sew together the week I spent in D.C.

The highlights of the week include visiting some Washington's important landmarks, insightful speakers, and forming friendships for a lifetime. Nick and I, the two Washington state delegates, were chosen to give introductory and closing remarks for senate historian Dr. Don Ritchie. I had the pleasure not only to give the closing remarks but to speak with him during lunch. History has always been one of my favorite subjects and speaking to a man who has studied history was such a great opportunity. Another notable speaker was administrator of NASA, Charles Bolden, who emphasized the importance of STEM education. As a student who attends a STEM school I was excited to learned that STEM education is becoming the foundation of knowledge for the future generations. I also enjoyed listening to Senator Cory Gardner who said "Always be a leader in everything you do." This is essentially what my ultimate goal is, to show the world that a good leader is: one who is humble at work making small changes that will eventually lead to a greater change.

The amazing tours, dinners and various venues all impressed me. One of my favorite dinners was where we ate at the National Archives, in the same room where the Constitution is preserved. I enjoyed listening to Senator Johnny Isakson, who said "In America, you can always accomplish everything you dream." Along with that he gave us 6 tips on life to always remember. His tips were: 1) gain knowledge, 2) build relationships, 3) have ethics, 4) show love, 5) have faith, and 6) always dream. I will forever cherish his advice especially now as I prepare to move out to college. My favorite quote from him was "regardless what your faith may or may not be, people will judge you based on how you treat others, so always treat people with respect, because having morals is about being polite and generous to those around you." Senator Isakson really impressed me with the humble manner in which he spoke and acted.

The day we meet the president, as we all anxiously waited in the East Room of the White House, I realized that among us were the future presidents, vice presidents, senators, secretaries of state, among other important positions. However, when President Obama said "Don't worry about what you want to be but what you want to do" it completely changed my perspective. It was then that I realized that it's not the position you hold that makes you a leader but rather what you accomplish as a leader. This to me means that we must aspire to make change in our communities in the issues that concern us instead of aspiring a prestigious position or career. I have learned that we, as the youth, are the future of America and if we wish to make change we must get passionate about the things that interest us. Overall, meeting President Obama was my absolute favorite moment. I was standing in the front row, approximately three feet away from him. Whatever your opinion may be on the president he is still the commander in chief of our country and having him standing in front of you overwhelms you with his presence. It brings a rush of excitement knowing he is a real person just like you and me. His words inspire me and I will forever remember his advice.

Looking back at my journal I realized that the most memorable moment was joining the other delegates, this experience has changed our mindset forever. My fellow delegates were some of the kindest, smartest, well dressed, and articulate individuals I have ever met. Even if we all came from different backgrounds or cultures, that week we all came together and we shared an experience of a lifetime. They helped me understand and form opinions on the various issues that exist within our communities. In a society where everything is changing so rapidly it's important for us, as the future generations, to be aware of the issues that surround us; and that we are able to stand up for what we believed in. Never before had I sat with such an amazing group of young adults who care so much about making a difference in our communities, states and even the nation. I see potential in each and every one of my fellow delegates.

It was a week full of excitement and much energy each day, despite the sleep deprivation each night. It was a week where arriving late to the breakfast table became my roommate's and my legacy. We will forever be known as the girls who oversleep but still managed to look flawless in 15 minutes. And who can forget the run we took across the Capitol towards the Supreme Court. I found myself unready to leave Saturday morning; it shocked me to see that it had all come to an end. These are memories I will forever hold in my heart, hoping to share them with my future generations. It was hard to say goodbye to all my new friends but I knew we all shared something within our hearts and memories. It was truly an experience I will never forget.