

Alexandra Prendergast, CT – 2016

Politics is a field of many players. For some, it is an excellent opportunity to attain extensive power and personal gain. But for others, it is a chance to create positive and sweeping change — a chance to find and make use of a different kind of power.

Delegates to the United States Senate Youth Program display a capacity for success in politics at an early age. Yet what makes USSYP truly unique is not merely its recognition of students with unusual talent. It brings youth to the heart of Washington and teaches the core principles of public service, the majority of which require an ability to place the interests of others before one's own. It seeks to bring generations of leaders together, both present and future, each inspiring the other along the way. Most importantly, it enables us to understand that despite the partisan gridlock in Congress and the political disillusionment such contention often creates, public service serves one ultimate goal. Quite simply, it is intended to help people.

Each experience throughout the week furthered this theme, and every speaker offered a transformative approach to our perspectives of the world. We had the opportunity to hear from some of the most powerful government officials in the country as they shared stories and ideas about creating a better future for all American citizens alike. We spent an evening in the rotunda of the National Archives, dining just a few feet away from the very documents that stitch our nation together. We asked questions of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, one of the most influential Supreme Court justices in U.S. history. We met with world class journalists, CEOs, international negotiators and defenders of the Constitution. Every word we heard from these individuals over the course of Washington Week will help better our problem-solving efforts, and the wisdom these officials so graciously imparted has equipped us with invaluable lessons. These lessons are the ammunition that will someday help our decisions meet their mark when we stand in the very same place today's leaders once stood. The sheer talent and drive of this year's delegation leaves little doubt that some of the most influential problem solvers of tomorrow are members of the 2016 USSYP class. The investment this program made in each one of us will unequivocally be returned.

There are many talented individuals with future careers in public service who did not have an opportunity to participate in the program this year. We are a very lucky few, and the gravity of that does not escape me. Participation in the United States Senate Youth Program is not only a gift, it is a responsibility. We must use the power we have for the creation of a different kind of change — and we must use it for good.