

Cade Herman, LA – 2016

As my Washington Week experience recedes into months passed, I further realize that this unparalleled experience is without translation. An experience such as the United States Senate Youth Program cannot be conveyed by words alone, for an accurate translation requires *feeling* - feeling the unquantifiable intellectual synergy, the paradoxical understanding found in disagreement, the largess of inspiration gifted by every speaker encountered.

After a handshake, an introduction, and a few photographs, the most pivotal moment of my Senate Youth experience unexpectedly occurred. My fellow delegate and I were able to ask Senator Bill Cassidy questions. Torn between a love for medicine and for public service, I asked him to share words of encouragement on how to address this seemingly forked road. As a physician and senator, he empathized with these passions and offered me a new perspective. "It is the same skill set applied in different situations," said Senator Cassidy. He instilled hope within me through these words and his own success in both arenas. The United States Senate Youth Program taught me that the road to my future can be as direct or as scenic as I wish, and in the words of President Obama, I should "focus more on what I *want to do*." I've thought tirelessly about who I *wanted to become*, but now, I am able to accept that this question does not need an answer now. What I *want to do* is now my focal point, and my "to-do" list is endlessly growing thanks to the transformative, motivating experience known as the United States Senate Youth Program.

Although the words of the United States Senate Youth Program will forever echo within me, the feelings that met me in Washington, D.C. are revisited daily. Saying the pledge of allegiance at George Washington's grave, experiencing a wreath laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, seeing the Key of Liberty that was presented to President Washington by the Marquis de Lafayette, dining in the presence of the Declaration of Independence, listening to President Obama respond to our unscripted questions are all pieces of the unforgettable United States Senate Youth Program framework. Senate Youth is the adrenaline rush from leaving your comfort zone, is the birthplace of nascent change-makers, is the think tank of impassioned young leaders. I did not believe there was such a place where history, current events, and notable figures could be at the fingertips of those with the drive to discover. I would have never thought that I would be on C-SPAN as a high school senior, and after that surprising occurrence, I hope that it is not my last time.

The United States Senate Youth Program is a week that I hope to never stop living. Its words and its feelings have stayed with me since my undesired departure. The life-long forged friendships are ways to relive the numbered moments at the Mayflower, the momentous gasps upon seeing a political hero, the goosebumps and smiles and tears alike felt at the program that changed us forever.