

Jake Jackowski, MA – 2016

When President Obama spoke the delegates, a piece of advice he gave truly resonated with me. He exhorted that we “don’t be cynical”. He divulged that he had once been very suspicious of traditional political structures and methods of change. This remark, besides being the closest thing to a “Marxist confession” by the president conservatives would ever get, made me think about my own skepticism and whether or not my own disillusionment with existing power structures was justifiable or would change. Obviously, the president of the United States is privy to vast amounts of classified information, some of which may inform his opinion on that matter. I thought, “When and why did the president change his opinion on this cynicism?” Though I never found out the answer to that question, I was nonetheless made to question my beliefs. I found this to be a common theme throughout Washington Week.

Interactions with my fellow delegates also made me question the rigidity to which I cling to my political beliefs. From lively discussions on the Democratic debate, to debates about organized religion, to dinner conversations on how North Dakotans pronounce the word “flag”, there was a plethora of unique worldviews which meant more than a fair share of conflicting opinions. I think it is refreshing to meet and converse in an intelligent and thoughtful manner with advocates of opposing viewpoints as it forces participants on all sides to be intellectually “on their toes.” People must corroborate views with facts, experiences, and knowledge. This exchange of knowledgeable opinions, of which there are many at USSYP, is both immensely fun and intellectually stimulating. Though I often question my beliefs, I am sure the other delegates would tell you that I still am impassioned when it comes to debating them. Anyone who purports to “never question their beliefs” is, to me, either an ideologue or lying. But political diatribe aside, the personal interaction between delegates is something that I will cherish as much if not more than my interactions with political big wigs. I look forward to staying in touch with the outstanding men and women I met during Washington Week. If not apparent yet, the quality of people at USSYP, from delegate to staff, from Alabama to Wyoming, is absolutely incredible. I cannot speak more highly of them, for they truly make Washington Week what it is.

One aspect of the program I was especially ignorant of before I attended Washington Week was the military mentor’s contribution to the overall atmosphere. My military mentor was not only helpful and exceedingly kind, but he also provided a different perspective with years of military service and meaningful worldly insights. The military mentors were always there to facilitate civil discussions, lend a helping hand, or be questioned ceaselessly about life in the armed services.

In addition to the wonderful people, the events coordinated by the USSYP staff are unparalleled. They are simply phenomenal. Everything from the guest speakers, to the Senate meetings, to the monument visits is meticulously planned and overwhelmingly impressive. The event that I happened to enjoy the most was when we met our senators. It was such an immense privilege to see such important and interesting political figures. To have a conversation with members of arguably the most powerful legislature in the world is incredible. I will admit that watching 104 political buffs fan-girl over such teen icons as Chuck Schumer and Orrin Hatch was also pretty amusing.

I would say that my experience at USSYP was one I will not soon forget. Each aspect from my truly amazing fellow delegates, to the fantastic events, to the stellar military mentors, to the hardworking and dedicated staff helped create an environment conducive to personal and intellectual reflection and growth in just one short week. My only advice about Washington Week for those future delegates scouring the pages of the USSYP website is this: take notes and be in the moment.