As I read the United States Senate Youth Program brochure, I tried to imagine what it would be like to take part in a program that "brings the highest-level officials from each branch of government together with an outstanding group of high school students for an intensive week-long educational program held in Washington, D.C." I just could not imagine how this would all unfold, but I was about to find out when my principal called me into his office. He was the first to congratulate me and tell me I had been selected as one of two Michigan delegates to the United States Senate Youth Program. His announcement was met with both extreme excitement and intense pangs of anxiety on my part. Where would we stay? How "intense" would our schedule be? Who would we meet? I had goosebumps just thinking about all the possibilities. What would my fellow delegates be like? And what would I wear?! I look back now and laugh at my apprehensions and trepidation. Although it might sound cliché, I can truly say that the United States Senate Youth Program was the greatest week of my life.

Throughout the week, I was met by one incredible experience after another. We were treated to elegant lunches and dinners peppered with inspiring words of wisdom from some of our nation's greatest leaders such as Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Senator Cory Gardner and Secretary of Energy Ernest Moniz. They shared with me, and my fellow delegates, their life stories and pearls of wisdom as to how we should navigate our future. We dined next to the Constitution and Declaration of Independence in the National Archives, both of which I had been studying just one week earlier in my high school government class. We met President Obama, who told us "don't focus on what you want to be, focus on what you want to do." I could hardly believe the leader of the free world spent more than an hour answering our questions and mentoring us on the importance of public service. I was blown away by his candor and approachable manner. I will never forget our time with President Obama in the East Room of the White House.

I was thoroughly impressed and moved by the many people we spoke to such as President Obama and German Ambassador Peter Wittig, and the historical and iconic places we visited such as George Washington's home, Mount Vernon, and the U.S. Department of State Diplomatic Reception Rooms. Perhaps equally as incredible and moving was the experience of meeting my 103 fellow USSYP delegates. Although we came from different states, cultures, and held different political ideologies, we bonded in our common intent on serving others and making our nation a better place for those around us. Although we said goodbye at the end of the week, I know all of our paths will cross again someday in the future.

I am most grateful to The Hearst Foundations' board of directors and the fantastic staff of the United States Senate Youth Program for allowing me to take part in such a life altering experience. This intensive week-long educational program held in Washington, D.C. has helped me realize what I want to do with my life. Over the course of six incredible days, I heard from the most dedicated government officials, and met the most amazing students, each of whom will assuredly make a lasting and profound difference in this world. The United States Senate Youth Program was an incredible program that has changed the way I think about our government, my future, and the role I hope to play in making our country a better place. I am now inspired to pursue a career in public service. Thank you to The Hearst Foundations for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.