

Quadri Bell, SC – 2016

I remember the day my sedulous career guidance counselor trudged down the hall to hand me an application. Immediately, I became skeptical and apathetic about having to complete another form. However, this one in particular was unique. After further researching the program and its specific aspects, that attitude of skepticism transformed into one of eagerness, optimism, and humbleness. The United States Senate Youth Program surpassed my already high expectations. Washington Week amplified my love of public service and left a permanent mark on my life. To have been a part of something with such prestige was truly inspiring. We had the high privilege and distinct honor of being addressed by the most powerful man in the world, met the United States senators that we admire so dearly, and we also received an hour of fame on national television! What an amazing week!

Aside from watching the debates on the mezzanine and spending time in the luxurious Mayflower Hotel, our visits to see government buildings and hear presentations from our officials were among the most memorable. My favorite speaker was, of course, President Obama. His message of hope and change resonates with me as I prepare for a future career in public service. The amazing life story he lives is only possible in our great nation. He is one of my heroes! In addition to our White House visit, meeting our United States senators was an extraordinary experience. The Senate is referred to as “the world’s greatest deliberative body.” The body is composed of each state’s senators. We see these inspirational figures on C-SPAN debating some of the most pressing issues like immigration reform and the budget, but to actually be in the same room with them, those were heartfelt moments!

With honor and humility I say with no regrets, this was the best week of my life! In the beginning, I was unsure that I belonged in such a prestigious program with some of the finest and most intellectual people in this nation. It was Senator Cory Gardner of Colorado who reminded me in his words that, “You belong here!” We, all 104 of us, belonged in this incredible youth program filled with breathtaking experiences! The United States Senate Youth Program strengthened my confidence and passion for politics through the main objectives: Education, Leadership, and Public Service.

As the future public servants of America, we have to be mindful of the issues we must confront. Americans see Congress as dysfunctional. In this political climate, we do not use the word hope much. And for good reason. The brinksmanship, partisanship, and toxic political atmosphere can leave you thinking, where is our country headed? However, it is important to choose hope over fear and optimism in the face of uncertainty. USSYP transformed my perspective on the federal government. One of my favorite quotes that sums this up perfectly came from the program’s chief, Program Director Rayne Guilford. In her closing remarks she said, “We don’t need to make America great again because as we can see from this program and all you amazing delegates, America is already great!” As we are blessed to live in this nation of opportunity, even though our country faces many challenges going into the future, hope is the golden choice to make. I am hopeful because there are 104 future leaders who love this country and embody its ideals. Because there are young people the United States Senate Youth Program helps mold into the leaders of tomorrow, the future is very bright! I plan to uphold my part in the inspiring task of making our nation a more perfect union. USSYP has helped to equip me with the skills and knowledge necessary to fulfill this task. I am forever grateful to my fellow delegates, our military mentors, the selfless and cordial USSYP staff, and The Hearst Foundations for giving me the autonomy to create eternal memories. Simply put, Washington Week 2016 of the 54th annual United States Senate Youth Program changed my life!