

Cesia Flores, TX – 2016

“At a certain point, during a very difficult time in one of my political elections, I almost thought of quitting, of retracting my entire political career but I luckily decided otherwise” (a statement paraphrased from the president of the United States, Barack Obama). Beyond any shadow of doubt, this statement exemplifies one of the most significant aspects of my experience as a United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) delegate. To me, the USSYP truly symbolized a reaffirmation of my dreams and aspirations to transcend our society through public policy; in other words, by allowing me to hear and converse with the “idols” of my political imagination, the USSYP empowered me to continue in my pursuits. This empowerment was further fomented by the remarkable experiences I shared with my fellow delegates, individuals who crossed the brinks of the partisanship found in our current political system to share insight on issues of transcendental significance in our country and, even, in our world. In fact, I can undoubtedly say that the intellectually stimulating exchanges I had with my fellow delegates, whether it be staying up late in the lobby discussing the campaign strategies demonstrated by Democratic and Republican candidates of the 2016 presidential election or simply speaking about an interesting service project or outside-of-school activity during the tour-like bus rides through Washington, D.C., proposed the most realistic manner in which I could fully grasp the distinct issues our country faces today. These issues are the reasons that we should embrace our passion for public policy; these issues are the bonds of responsibility and might that will forever connect us - the future constituents of America, the individuals with courage to never stop fighting for equality and peace, the 104 delegates to the 2016 USSYP.

Additionally, I believe it imperative to highlight the sincere honor we, delegates, had of interacting with our incomparable military mentors, who represent courageous leaders in their respective fields. Coming from a background that lacks a military presence, it is truly an “adventure” of the mind to converse with our mentors and to attempt to grasp what their roles entail. Through conversations with distinct military mentors, I began to truly understand what it’s like to put one’s life on the line for our American nation. I even learned about disputes like gender equality in the Marines and obtained real military perspectives on the use of drones in combat – issues I had never cared to discuss before but which I now consider crucially interesting and compelling. In fact, my experience at the Arlington National Cemetery further made me proud to now know people in the military and to appreciate all that they do.

Furthermore, the speakers of the week also contributed greatly to my USSYP experience. Specifically Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Senator Cory Gardner of Colorado, and President Barack Obama were among the most impactful speakers. Justice Ginsburg who spoke about the importance of eliminating gender bias in law and of the remarkable manner in which traditional gender roles have been drastically changed and Senator Gardner who spoke of going against incorrect principles at all levels of government, with a manner of courage, reaffirmed my interest in pursuing a career in law. President Obama’s phrase of “focusing not on what we want to be but rather on what we want to do” reminded me to always see beyond myself and try to make a change in the lives of those who cannot fend for themselves. In the end, all of the speakers, the distinguished public servants who work for the greater good of America, instilled in me a desire to never to give up on my dream of serving our country through public policy. Thank you to The Hearst Foundations for this incredible opportunity. I look forward to applying what I’ve learned to better our nation in the years to come.