

Robert (Christian) Parker, AR – 2017

It is hard to look back on a program like the United States Senate Youth Program and accurately capture all feelings, thoughts, and emotions experienced in a week that throttled every participant's mental state to the point of sensory overload. Condensing the thoughts written on my detailed notes inscribed during the week seems a disservice to the reader but under the constraints given will have to suffice.

Heading off to Washington Week I knew in my heart that this week would make or break my ambition to pursue a career in public service. Having completed Washington Week, a new fire has been lit in my soul and my ambitions confirmed. I arrived under pretenses of confusion, not knowing a single person nor having had anyone near me with any clue as to what exactly the program I would be attending even was. How soon I would be enlightened.

First of all, there are not many times in life, or really any times in life for most people, to tell people you cannot talk about your activities as they contain classified information which could compromise national security. That was cool; something which I will continue to brag about for the rest of my life, and make everyone around me jealous. Aside from that initial introduction to Washington Week, I quickly started to socialize and meet brilliant minds from across our nation. I realized almost immediately that I was not the smartest person in the room, and I loved it. Far too often in my community, in the sphere of politics, it is impossible to hold a conversation which contains even the smallest granule of substance with someone. At Washington Week, my ideas were challenged, philosophy disputed, and ideology tested. I reveled in that. However aside from the policy side of the social atmosphere, I met wonderful people from across our country who shared similar interests aside from politics. They were truly fantastic people who I count it a privilege to have even gotten to meet. The Military Mentors such as Lieutenant Dobrow and Major Bissell were absolutely tremendous, and shared experiences from their life which helped to guide me in shaping my future. I loved all of the people I met at USSYP, even those whom I disagree with.

The moment that most sticks out in my mind was going to the White House to meet President Donald Trump. Meeting the man who rewrote the book of modern politics was something extraordinary that had been a dream of mine. That moment happens to be my most asked about moment as well. Other than that story, I like to speak to people about Israeli ambassador, Ron Dermer. I thought his matter-of-fact style of speaking was refreshing, and getting to ask him questions regarding his views on the administration's future with Israel was enthralling. Getting to be on C-SPAN was also enjoyable, even though I doubt less than 1000 people were watching to see us.

With all this being said, it is impossible to thank The Hearst Foundations, the United States Senate, and the Department of Defense enough for all the time, resources, and love they put into this program. I enjoyed every moment I was there. Giving the farewell address with my fellow Arkansan was an experience I doubt I will ever forget. I left Washington - a place known for its gridlock and frustrations - invigorated and full of energy to take on the future, and with the wonderful knowledge that the future will be in good hands.