

## Michael Moonjely, IA – 2017

Every time I open my Moleskine notebook or look at one of Jakub and Erin's photos, I am reminded of how unique the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) 2017 was. There is no way to truly capture how impactful Washington Week was on me and my fellow delegates, but I am certain that I will remember the experience for the rest of my life.

My fellow delegates were the most passionate and well-spoken people I have ever met. Their ability to seamlessly transition between a serious debate about a controversial political issue to discussing memes was incredible, and everyone had a genuine interest in hearing the other side to an issue.

I will never forget talking with my Military Mentor group every night. The endless conversations and debates made running on three hours of sleep a day and drinking copious amounts of coffee worth it. We were from different places on the political spectrum and came from different backgrounds, but we were able to become extremely close in a short amount of time.

Dr. Jeffrey Herbst, president of the Newseum, offered a pragmatic view of the press. He delved into the financial history of newspapers and explained how news corporations got to the vulnerable place they are today. His visionary insight towards the future of journalism combined with his passion to hold politicians accountable was refreshing and changed the way I consume news.

There is nothing like sitting in the Supreme Court and knowing that the chief justice will appear. Having the opportunity to see Chief Justice John Roberts on his own turf, a room where he has changed the course of American history, was an extremely humbling moment. He spoke candidly about the court's evolving role, and his passion to keep politics out of the judicial system.

The Senate reception was the one of the most exhilarating moments of the week. Although both myself and my co-delegate were on the opposite side of the political spectrum compared to both of Iowa's senators, we had a fascinating conversation. Senator Joni Ernst was genuinely interested in spending time with us, and answered our questions in a poised, unfiltered manner. I came away from the interaction with a great deal of respect for what she has accomplished, and was struck by how determined she is to make the people of Iowa proud.

The week was meticulously planned with every detail carefully thought through. From seating delegates with speakers that aligned with their interests to allowing us to introduce speakers from our home state, the personal touches were extremely special. I had the opportunity to introduce the Secretary of the Senate Julie Adams in the immaculate Kennedy Caucus Room as well as eat breakfast with legendary journalist Bob Schieffer. It still feels surreal that I was able to experience so much in such a short period of time, but I will be forever grateful to The Hearst Foundations, Senate Youth Program staff, and my fellow delegates for making the week phenomenal.