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My United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) experience can be best explained by two words: disbelief and reassurance. My initial reaction to being told I was selected to be a part of USSYP was sheer disbelief. I was in shock that someone has vested so much hope in me and thought that I was qualified for such an honor. As my initial shock dissipated, and the months leading up to USSYP passed, I grew more and more excited at the prospect of hearing from such esteemed speakers and meeting my 103 fellow delegates.

It is hard to establish what the highlight of my USSYP experience was. Each and every moment, whether it was hearing from the chief justice of the Supreme Court or simply carrying light conversation and making jokes with fellow delegates after the day's activities will be experiences that I treasure in the years to come. I will never be able to forget the way it felt when Chief Justice John Roberts said that he was sure he would see some of us argue in the Supreme Court in the future or when Senator Gary Peters asked me if I would run for office someday. In fact, the program's lovely photographers managed to capture what I think was the exact moment Senator Peters asked me that, and it's a picture that I've saved to desktop and reference often.

Whenever people ask me about USSYP, they often ask about how it felt to meet the president of the United States or what it felt like when Senator Bernie Sanders walked into the room during the Senate Reception. However, I can never walk away from a conversation about USSYP without mentioning my fellow delegates. Whether it was discussing the future of the Democratic Party with a Republican or a friend telling me about her initiative to provide hungry children with lunches during the summer, I know that I will treasure each and every interaction that I had with my fellow delegates. Knowing that people thought I was accomplished enough to part of a group with these amazing, passionate students was all the validation that I will probably ever need.

Something that USSYP provided me with, something that I will always be grateful for, is reassurance. Reassurance that this is what I am meant to be doing with my life. Although I'd always enjoyed discussing politics, working on campaigns, and serving my community, I had been doubtful as to whether or not I was fit for a career in public service. The most important lesson that I learned during the week was that public service is not about appearances. Even though we live in a time of personality driven politics, it is important to remember that hard work matters. Standing up for what you believe in and putting in every ounce of effort into work you care about is what truly counts at the end of the day. Although the three course meals and fancy chandeliers (of which there were many, trust me) were nice, I am eternally grateful for all the realizations that the USSYP has allowed me to come to.