

## Alexander Pavlicin, MN – 2017

Our coach bus passed by the Trump International Hotel and its shiny golden entrance. We whizzed by the white walls of the Treasury and the White House, slowing at a stoplight near the EPA building. Then, it stood before us. The silence and serenity of its sculpted pillars signaled to us that we had arrived: we entered the Supreme Court Building of the United States.

The Supreme Court building serves as the workplace of some of our nation's most respected leaders: the nine justices that serve on the United States Supreme Court. For most days of the year, only the Supreme Court staff is allowed into some parts of the building, but I had the opportunity as part of the United States Senate Youth Program to receive a tour of the courtroom where oral arguments are heard. The awe-inspiring architecture of the courtroom has been preserved for decades by a restriction on electronics in the Supreme Court Building. Even the media abides by this rule, going 'old-fashioned' with pen and paper when there is a Supreme Court case being discussed.

After learning about the history of the Supreme Court and the Supreme Court Building, I had another incredible honor: meeting with Chief Justice John Roberts. As he walked into the courtroom, there was a calming presence about him that exuded respect. Chief Justice Roberts shared his experiences on the Supreme Court and answered questions from the delegates. He is a genuine, personable human being in an age where there is a lack of trust for many public officials.

Chief Justice Roberts also explained one concept of our government to me that I will never forget. He described the judicial branch as the only branch of government capable of making decisions that are completely independent of political views or election cycles. In his view, justices should base their decisions on the law and the possible effects a law might have on American life. All other matters are ultimately supposed to be left to either the executive branch or Congress. I have always admired the way Chief Justice Roberts has maintained stability on the court despite political change, but now I understand his actions more clearly, and I have a much greater appreciation as a result.

Another aspect of American government that I started to understand more fully as the week went on was the importance of helping our leaders make smart choices. As important as voting is to the success of our democracy, it's the actions that happen after an election that are arguably more important. We don't always get to be the decision-makers, but it's our responsibility as Americans to *help* our decision-makers go down a path that is best for our country. Our country was founded on the principle that the people should lead their government – so how can we expect our leaders to make educated decisions if we quit on them the day after an election?

Fulfilling our civic duty to our leaders looks a little bit different for everyone. It might mean calling a senator about a particular issue, starting a civic-minded club for something you are passionate about, or even helping out around the neighborhood. The most important thing we can do for a successful future is to get involved. Washington Week reaffirmed for me that young people have the power to be the unifying force in creating meaningful change.