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No words on this paper — literally nothing in the world — can do the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) justice. My time in Washington, D.C. was an indescribable experience, one that undoubtedly changed my life.

Before my time in Washington, I often found myself caught up in cynicism, wondering to myself if I could actually affect change hailing from rural Mississippi. As a first generation college student, I felt like my options were limited, but Washington Week illuminated the world for me. I had the incredible experience of listening to so many impactful speakers, each contributing to the wellbeing of society in his/her own way. Whether it be through the Senate, a government agency, or even a nonprofit, each of the people I had the honor of meeting dedicated their lives to changing the world, and I have never been more inspired.

I walked away with passion coursing through my veins, and my experience made me ready to tackle the world head on. What was once fear and apprehension is now enthusiasm and a burning desire to go out and make an impact. The confidence I have and the burning passion I feel would have never been possible without USSYP, and I am forever grateful for the opportunity and the recognition. Because of the lessons I learned, I now feel ready to embark on my journey to help my state and her people.

Despite the divisiveness of today's politics, we all interacted together, learned together, and grew together. Every single delegate radiated this beautiful humanitarian desire, and I walked away having never felt more proud to be an American. I have never felt more excited to be alive. I learned more than I thought possible not only through the speakers but also through my fellow delegates. Each of them are incredibly insightful and driven, and one of our speakers taught us to "Never doubt the power of a few individuals committed to changing the world." I no longer have fear for the future. While we will undoubtedly face great trials of our strength and determination, I have no doubts that our generation and country will overcome. No matter their fields, no matter their interests, I am certain that each of them will continue to leave a mark on this Earth, and I am so honored to have been able to meet them.

I would be remiss if I did not thank The Hearst Foundations for their unparalleled generosity. They were dedicated to making the experience an unforgettable one. The organization has truly invested in our future and the future of our nation, and I am so indebted to everyone who has helped change my life.

The United States Senate Youth Program is an experience like no other. It may sound cliché, but in just one week, I have walked away knowing that the course of my life has been changed forever. I am forever grateful for everyone who made that week possible from the extraordinary speakers, to the heroic military mentors, to the generous Hearst Foundations members, and finally, to my inspiring fellow delegates.

Senator Cory Booker remains the most memorable speaker to me. He left us with a powerful message: "You're walking around like you hit a triple, but you were born on third base. You eat food at the banquet prepared by your ancestors. You sit in the shade of trees that you did not plant, and you drink water from a well that you did not dig." He helped me recognize all of the sacrifices everyone has made to get me where I am today. I walk away from this program a changed man. I gained insight and gratitude, and above all, I gained determination. I may not be able to pay my ancestors back, but I will pay them forward. Together, the delegates of the 55th annual Washington Week will change the world. I conclude by saying that nothing I have written gives the program an ounce of justice. All I can do is encourage you to apply and see for yourself. Witness the miracle that is USSYP. Come and have your life changed.