

Robert Cade Slaughter, MS – 2017

Washington, D.C. is overflowing with movers and shakers who are intent about shaping our nation's government on a day-to-day basis. As a delegate to the United States Senate Youth Program, I was allowed to see, firsthand, the way in which these movers and shakers work. I witnessed the chief justice of the Supreme Court speak to us while we sat in the same room that has produced some of our nation's most important decisions. I shook hands with President Trump and dined next to our nation's Constitution. My week in Washington, D.C. was filled with memorable experiences and laughter juxtaposed with humbling words from outstanding speakers. However, my greatest takeaway from the United States Senate Youth Program was the comfort I found while looking around at my fellow delegates, recognizing that our nation's movers and shakers were once the same eager high school students that I spent a week in companionship with while at the United States Senate Youth Program.

As I walked into the White House, my role as an activist was solidified. Those walls, those historic halls, and the rich history of that house are the pinnacle of democracy. America's home, the White House, represents a statement of freedom that followed the delegates everywhere we travelled to in Washington, D.C. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson advised us to take every encounter with another individual as an opportunity to further our knowledge. Senator Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota insisted that our minds are too important to compromise. Our speakers allowed me to put a face to democracy, to see democracy in action. The friends that I made through the United States Senate Youth Program ignited thought-provoking conversations, laughter, and more laughter. Very rarely does a teenager discover an experience that allows them to express their political opinions in an environment of proportional respect and cultivation, but the United States Senate Youth Program has masterfully fostered this desired environment.

There was a common thread in every speech that the delegates heard: we are the future of our democracy. The United States Senate Youth Program placed me in a group of 103 other delegates from around our country and respective military bases overseas. The level of intellect and passion embedded in the characters of my fellow delegates gave me the greatest point of motivation I have ever experienced. Our future as a nation is bright because we have dedicated movers and shakers in our nation's capital today, but our future as a nation is even more promising because we have an unmatched level of determination in my generation of movers and shakers. I want to be a part of my nation's turning point, and my generation will be the individuals to bring this growth to fruition. I have the United States Senate Youth Program to thank for this realization and for providing me with friendships I cannot wait to watch grow in the name of democracy.