

Drew Hill, OK – 2017

Why me? This is the question that was running through my head during Washington Week... why me? Out of everyone who wanted to be selected for the program, why was I chosen? What did I do to be selected as a delegate for the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP)? There were several times that I doubted my right to be a part of the program. Was I smart enough? Was I informed enough? Was I “politician-y” enough? I have to be honest, before I entered Washington Week, my answer to those questions, was no. When I examined the USSYP Class of 2017 and their individual accomplishments, I was taken aback by the level of talent that existed, and I have to be honest, I was frightened by it. I did not believe that I would be able to coexist with such incredibly accomplished people, but man, was I wrong. After my experience with Washington Week, I emerged as a more confident leader. Instead of asking “why me,” the United States Senate Youth Program gave me the confidence to ask “why not me?”

There were many interactions that occurred during Washington Week that made me feel more comfortable and confident, but there is one in particular that impacted me the most. It was not shaking the president’s hand, hearing from Chief Justice John Roberts, or even having dinner in the Rotunda of the National Archives. Rather, it was something much smaller. This moment was when I got to take a picture with Senator Marco Rubio. This moment was special for several reasons. For one, it was not expected. Senator Rubio was only asked to take a picture with the two delegates from Florida, but instead of stopping there, he kept going. After he took his picture with the Florida delegates, he came over to the rest of the delegates, there were over a hundred of us, and he visited for almost 10 minutes. He took pictures, signed autographs, and made small talk. I was at the outside of the group looking in. I did not try to bust through. But I did try to get a selfie, and it did not work. It showed up blurry; however, I was content because I knew that was probably as close as I would get, but in that moment, right when I was turning away Senator Rubio walked up to me and asked me to take the selfie with him again, and in that moment I was completely shocked. It was another “why me?” situation.

There is a story that I would like to share that relates to my encounter with Senator Rubio and my experience with Washington Week as a whole. The story starts with a young boy who was walking along a beach upon which thousands of starfish had been washed up during a terrible storm. When he came to each starfish, he would pick it up, and throw it back into the ocean. People watched him with amusement. He had been doing this for some time when a man approached him and said, “boy, why are you doing this? Look at this beach! You can’t save all these starfish. You can’t begin to make a difference!” The boy seemed crushed, suddenly deflated. But after a few moments, he bent down, picked up another starfish, and hurled it as far as he could into the ocean. Then he looked up at the man and replied, “Well, I made a difference to that one!” Senator Rubio taught me one of the most valuable lessons in leadership by doing what he did. He showed me that being a public servant is about seeking to make a change in the world one person at a time.

I would like to thank Senator Rubio for being unselfish with his time and giving me a lesson in servant leadership that I will cherish for a lifetime, along with a pretty cool picture too. I would also like to thank The Hearst Foundations for being selfless with their time, money, and resources in providing high school students like myself with an incredible inside look into public service. The Hearst Foundations is an outstanding organization that does an exceptional job at making a difference in the lives of youth from around the country. I know that I will truly miss my experience in Washington, D.C, but as Winnie The Pooh once said, “How lucky am I to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard.” Although I miss Washington Week, I am thankful for the lessons, friendships, and experiences that made leaving it so hard. They truly made a difference to this one.