

Carter Martindale, UT – 2017

May I have your attention please? Ladies and Gentlemen, this is, I think, the best way I can begin my delegate essay. Whenever I think back over my experience at the 2017 United States Senate Youth Program, the sonorous voice of Steve Cox immediately jumps to my mind. Along with it comes the countless jokes and pleas amongst delegates to hear him say one more time, "Dinner is served". Although not an official speaker on our agenda, the director of ceremonies Steve Cox is certainly one of the most memorable speakers to me, and someone I would highly recommend to stay with the program for years to come.

Beyond Mr. Cox, another speaker that stood out to me was the United States surgeon general Vivek Murthy. Dr. Murthy immediately began his address towards us, the youth, rather than covering it with general pleasantries. He acknowledged the decisions and challenges we were facing in life, and gave us advice as high achieving students as to how we can best navigate the experience of life. Furthermore, he was undeniably genuine with us: speaking as an immigrant, a former student, a public servant, and as a mentor, the surgeon general spoke from his heart and gave me some advice that I will never forget: no matter how planned out my life seems right now, I should not be afraid to go where life takes me. In addition to his wonderful address, I also had the opportunity to sit at the breakfast table with Dr. Murthy, introducing myself personally to him and shaking his hand. While there, he asked each of the youth at the table about their interest in health care, and about any questions we might have had for him. This individual focus from one of the leading physicians and medical minds in America absolutely blew my mind, and is an experience I will cherish for a lifetime.

Now, I would like to take some time to speak about the fellow delegates at this program. As it grew closer to Washington Week countless thoughts were running through my mind, from what I would wear, to what the food would be like, to whether I would cry when I met the chief justice of the United States, and finally to whether or not I would get a shout out for my hair (which lo and behold I would! Thank you Senator Booker for singling me out personally). However, the one thought that had not crossed my mind was about the caliber of the other youth attending this program. In one short week I met and grew to love students from all across the country and formed bonds of friendship that rival any I have made previously. Regardless of what state they came from, each of the delegates were knowledgeable, approachable, willing to debate political stances, but most importantly willing to listen to each other as equals. Whether joking about President Donald Trump or waiting in reverence to hear from the Chief Justice of the United States, there was a bond between delegates that I cannot explain in words.

Specifically, I cannot reflect upon Washington Week without mentioning my Military Mentor group. After just the first day, I learned to love these gentlemen, and proceeded to stay up every night discussing various political issues with each and every one of them. Throughout this process I learned a great deal more about school choice, immigration, and religion, and was amazed by the sheer amount of knowledge each of them had in respective subjects; I also had the opportunity to out one of the delegates as secretly conservative, although he was masquerading as a liberal/independent. I even met a delegate from Massachusetts who I am likely to see throughout college, and getting to know him and pick his brain about my school choice was truly a treat.

Finally, I would like to end with reiterating the love we all felt for our wonderful photographer, Jakub Mosur, and the impact he had on me. From day one this amazing man had worked to recognize and memorize each of the 104 delegates' names. Even working with each of the delegates every day, I can honestly say that I am not confident I could identify every one of them (sorry everyone, just being honest). Jakub, however, knew me on sight as I walked into the ballroom in the Mayflower Hotel. He even went so far as to have an in depth conversation about my religion as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and his thoughtfulness and knowledge about various religious texts and beliefs inspired me. His loving attitude and effort to capture the program reflected the overall theme of public service I felt throughout the week.

In short, Washington week was truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Whether through contact with fellow delegates, or listening to prestigious speakers, my experience with the United States Senate Youth Program left me astounded, invigorated to serve, and grateful.