

## Chloe Dulaney, WA – 2017

It is hard to find words to describe my experience at the United States Senate Youth Program. Simply put, it was life changing. Coming from a small town to somewhere as big as D.C was incredible. The combined environment with speakers, executives from The Hearst Foundations, Military Mentors, and delegates, with a backdrop of some of the most historical places in our nation's capital was simply amazing.

I will start with the obvious, the speakers. The speakers were all amazingly qualified and knowledgeable in their area of expertise. The speakers that stand out the most in my mind are Bob Schieffer, Senator Cory Booker, and Surgeon General VADM Vivek Murthy. All three of these speakers weaved personal experience and knowledge into speeches that were relevant to the problems facing leaders today, and that leaders of the future will face. Bob Schieffer discussed the importance of the press in a democracy. He discussed the responsibilities associated with being a member of the press with statements like "The most important thing we can do is get it right," and "a lie can go all the way around the world while the truth is putting it's pants on." He also discussed how the press' job is to ask questions, and the history of attacks on the media. One of my favorite things said by Schieffer was "I might be a little more hip than any of you expect." Senator Cory Booker discussed the issue of privilege and inequality, how far we have come as a country, and how far we have to go. He discussed how the privileges that people take for granted today did not exist for many not that long ago. He talked about how in the past all different types of people came together to help others that may not have had the same advantages. He encouraged us to pay it forward, and work together. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy discussed the issues of public health, both on a global level, and as it affects our country. What stuck with me the most from his speech was the issue of community health. He talked about how having safe communities with sidewalks, and affordable healthy foods could prevent health problems that affect many Americans. You must be concerned with the health of everyone, not only those in our country since people travel between countries, and the health of one can affect the health of many. He discussed projects he has worked on, like training young girls in poverty stricken rural areas in India so that they could become traveling medical professionals in places where medical care is nonexistent. While all of the speakers came from different walks of life, they all encouraged us to find what is meaningful for us, and encouraged us to be inspired and creative when coming up with solutions to problems that are visible and will become visible in our lifetime. After listening to Chief Justice John Roberts speak, I remember thinking, these are actual people that run our country, they just have incredible jobs. Throughout hearing all of the different speakers, it really humanized the figures that you see in the news daily, and brought to light how much behind the scenes action really goes on.

The part of the week that probably had the biggest effect on me were my interactions with the other student delegates. All of the delegates came from different backgrounds politically, economically, and culturally, but everyone was very open minded. It was a real honor to have a chance to talk to all of these high school juniors and seniors in a truly meaningful way. At no point during the week was I scared to state my opinion about an issue or topic, because I knew that while some may have differing views, everyone was willing to hear and consider the views of others. Being a part of this group made me extremely hopeful for the future of our country, and showed me that bipartisanship is not only possible, but also likely in our country's future. All of the student delegates were kind, humble, regardless of their many accomplishments, and internally beautiful. Part of the interaction with other delegates was through mentor groups. In a way these small groups become your family for the week, with your mentor as the cool Aunt that is tasked with making sure you don't forget your ID, badge, or coat, and that no one gets lost in between the door and the coach. It was truly amazing to be a part of such an amazing group of delegates.

The Military Mentors, while a component that from the outside may not appear to be something that would make a huge difference in the program do. All of the mentors were highly decorated but also relatable. All of the mentors seemed just as excited and proud to be a part of Washington Week as the delegates were. Learning about the different experiences that led the mentors to go into the military and the experiences they had since joining was just as impactful as the speakers. They all had an enthusiasm

for learning as much as they could during Washington Week, and I am assuming that they carry that same work ethic and desire for knowledge in their careers. I feel like my interactions with the Military Mentors helped me gain a new level of appreciation for those who serve our country in the military.

I cannot even begin to describe the impact the Hearst staff had on the program. From coordinating travel plans for 104 people, to creating the schedule for the program, I cannot even imagine the amount of time, work, and dedication it took to organize the program. All I can say is thank you. Thank you for your time and commitment to the United States Senate Youth Program. Thank you for the amazing opportunity you offered us. Thank you for your commitment to our future.

While the impact that the United States Senate Youth Program had on me is hard to describe, I am sure that as time goes on I will find new and different ways that it has affected my growth as a person. Between the speakers, delegates, Military Mentors, and Hearst Foundations directors and staff, the experience was better than I ever imagined it would be. I am so grateful that I had this opportunity, and I always will be.