

Craig Robertson, WA – 2017

Most of the time, you are not able to understand the true meaning that a certain event will have on your life until afterwards. Our modern lives are so fast paced that we are bombarded with a plethora of different experiences and stimuli. Our lives are about throwing our experiences at a wall and seeing what sticks. However, there are a small number of events throughout our lives that we know will have a profound impact while we are experiencing them. The United States Senate Youth Program was one of these experiences for me. I was so amazed by every experience throughout the week that all I could do was sit back and watch my view on my life and our government change forever.

All of the speakers offered incredible insight into the workings of the government. Some speakers stick out in my memory especially, however. Hearing Chief Justice John Roberts speak was an absolutely incredible experience. The fact that he didn't use a microphone and that he was so easy to relate to was so unexpected. Hearing first person insight into the workings of America's highest court was almost hard to comprehend. Also, it was interesting that it was the 160th anniversary of the Dred Scott decision on the day that we heard Chief Justice Roberts speak. He stated that this decision was one of the biggest mistakes the Supreme Court has made, which was fascinating insight. Additionally, I found Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy to be an incredibly engaging speaker. He had an incredibly positive take on politics and the world which I enjoyed immensely. My favorite quote from his speech is "Everyone has a deep well of potential within them; we just need to give them a chance." This captures Dr. Murthy's love of serving others and his selflessness, which was awe inspiring to hear in person. Furthermore, I found Senator Cory Booker to be a dynamic and emotional speaker. I was so engaged in his speech that I was almost incapable of taking notes. He had me hanging on every word. His ability to highlight the injustice present in our government and country today was impressive. The quote I will remember most from his speech is "Don't walk around this place like you hit a triple, you were born on third base." I would be honored to be able to cast a vote for Mr. Booker in the future, perhaps for the office of president, and hopefully work on his campaign. Finally, I will always remember being addressed by President Donald Trump in the White House. This was a surreal experience, and he had some truly inspiring words of encouragement for us. Regardless of political beliefs or party affiliation, being able to hear the president speak is an honor, and I enjoyed every minute of his speech, along with Vice President Mike Pence's speech.

The places we were able to go throughout the week were breathtaking as well. The Mayflower Hotel was very beautiful, and I was honored to be able to stay there. In addition to this, I was amazed by the Diplomatic Reception Rooms at the State Department. I am extremely interested in foreign policy and international relations, and being able to see where the most powerful nation on Earth meets with other nations was surreal. Also, seeing the Supreme Court was spectacular. The building itself is so huge it is hard to put into words. The architecture mirrors that of a Roman temple, and it feels every bit as impressive and historic as the temples in the Roman Forum. Most of all, going inside of the White House was something I had always dreamed of doing. I remember standing in the front room and staring out across the front lawn at all of the tourists peering through the fence. At this moment I knew how truly amazing this experience was. I especially enjoyed all of the art inside the White House, as well as the elegantly furnished rooms.

While the people and places we went impressed me, what I will take with me for the rest of my life is what I learned about myself throughout the week. This was aided by the conversations and interactions I had with other delegates. Being able to talk to a collection of some of the most accomplished high school students from across the nation allowed me to reflect upon my own achievements and strengths. The lasting friendships I made during the Senate Youth Program are invaluable as well. Everyone was able and willing to eloquently state their own political tendencies and beliefs, which caused me to refine my own beliefs and build off what others said. However, being in such an elite group of students made me feel inadequate at times, which was a struggle in the beginning. Throughout the week, I was never called upon to ask a question or speak at any of the events, which was unfortunate. I credit this to the fact that I am more quiet and reserved, and like to fully formulate questions before I raise my hand. While Brian Lamb, the founder of C-SPAN, was interviewing delegates for the student town hall, I had a

revelation about myself that I wrote in my notebook. As delegate after delegate was called upon to speak, I wrote "It's all good being reserved and cautious, but the world isn't going to stop and wait for you to make up your mind." I am so used to being able to take my time and fully formulate ideas at my own pace, but unfortunately the world doesn't work like that. What I will take away most from the Senate Youth Program is that sometimes you need to take a risk and make an impulsive decision. The opportunity for growth and change from this risk far outweighs the possible drawbacks. The United States Senate Youth Program has been the most incredible opportunity I have been lucky enough to have in my life, and I would like to thank The Hearst Foundations for giving me this incredible opportunity to grow as a person and revitalize my interest in politics and government. As an immigrant to this country, I never imagined that I would one day be participating in such an outstanding U.S. government focused program, and it has caused me to consider the possibility of an international relations or policy-based career in the future.