

Carlee Goldberg, FL – 2018

Over the course of seven days, I met with those who will be responsible not just for creating our history, but for recording it for the future. In my interactions with the leaders of government, military, and press, I expected the famous names to be my favorite part of the program, and they were a huge aspect of it. Meeting the newest Supreme Court justice and shaking hands with the editor of *The Washington Post* leaves a mark I doubt one can forget. Yet my favorite experiences came not from what I expected, but rather what I didn't.

Two weeks prior to my week in DC, the school next to my house, in my small hometown of Parkland, became the center of a global phenomenon when an ex-student open-fired on the students. In its aftermath, youth activism became the leading force of change among my community and around the world. As I went into this program, I knew there was no better time, no more relevant and more personal experience than what those seven days in D.C. would be like. Surrounded by 103 of the best and brightest civic-minded students in the country and meeting some of the most powerful people in charge of policy-making broke down the barrier between us and them. It was no longer an individual dream to one day achieve the status of a leader and a changer, but the shared dream of all of us to shape the world in the way we wanted to see it. Whether it was questioning the speakers to the point that even experts in their fields were stumped or participating in the C-SPAN televised student town hall, we were a community of leaders rather than a group of individuals.

The most memorable experience I had was a story I heard from the Senate Historian Betty Koed. Growing up with a love for the judicial branch and knowledge of both the executive and legislative branches, I was not expecting to find much of her field to relate to my interests. Especially as her role was in non-policymaking, I was not expecting a very exciting discussion. I settled in for the beginning of her speech, in which she started off answering the most common question asked to historians: what is your favorite historical story? Her answer was anything but boring. She explained to us the life of Senator Charles Sumner. Her love for the story, she said, came not from what I knew, which was the senator beaten nearly to death, but what came after. She spoke on how history's attention ends the night Brooks took a cane to Sumner's head, but his biggest and most important battle, a fight for racial equality with "no distinction between black or white," took place at the end of his life. In fact, the 1964 Civil Rights Bill and subsequent desegregation of schools was a near carbon copy of the bill Sumner spent his dying days fighting to pass in 1875.

As she talked more about history's tendency to forget conclusions, I couldn't help but find the connection to what was occurring not just in Parkland but in the current wave of activism around the country. Especially in today's political climate, we exist with a tendency to view the success and commitment to activities in the form of how passionate or attention-grabbing our actions become. However, it's what history forgets in the aftermath of the marches and protests that the change actually occurs. Her final words resonated so much with what the United States Senate Youth Program was and what it represented for all of us: "History is made when ordinary people accomplish the extraordinary, just because history may not tell the ending does not mean these ordinary people did not accomplish it."

Here's the moral of this story. Youth activism has exploded into a national movement, and it started in my backyard. Every day, I see the calls for action and movement for change. In a room with 103 of these leaders and servers, we faced those in power both with the nation's respect and its turmoil. We listened, learned, and questioned the policies, actions, and consequences of those in positions of power across fields and scopes. Yet despite the mass array of people we met, one factor remained constant in our participation with these fellow leaders. This way of thinking and doing, this idea of change doesn't end with us, it begins.