

## **Andrew Honeycutt-Robinson, DE – 2019**

At a program as prestigious as the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP), you would think that my favorite speaker would be Chief Justice John Roberts, my favorite visit would be the State Department tour, or my favorite aspect of the program would be the chance to network with professionals in fields I am interested in. That would be a logical assumption. And yet, it would be an incorrect one. In reality, the best parts of the program were not only the parts most would never expect, but the parts I never expected either.

Let's start with the best speaker. We heard from many over the course of the week — the Chief Justice, Secretary of State Pompeo, and ABC Chief Global Affairs Correspondent Martha Raddatz to name just a few. Yet none of these was my favorite speaker. Rather, it was the Historian of the United States Senate, Betty Koed. She chose to use her time to narrate to us the gripping story of the Civil Rights Act of 1964's passage in the Senate. She told us of the bipartisan cooperation it took between liberal Republicans and progressive Democrats, the importance of leadership in the process, and the ever-important story that good legislation takes time. What was most memorable, however, was the conversation I had with her afterward about an essay I had just finished writing on the history and importance of the Johnson Amendment. At the end of our discussion, she gave me her card and told me to email her my essay. As a self-proclaimed history nerd, there was nothing more thrilling.

I'll also never forget our trip to the Library of Congress. Having grown up just two hours outside of D.C., it was far from my first time there. In fact, I had even gotten a Library of Congress card two years ago so that I could go into the reading room. However, I had never been there with such a knowledgeable tour guide. Ariana, a delegate from Alabama, and I spent the visit with our guide, asking her to show us her favorite parts of the building. She explained to us the significance of the various names on the ceiling of the building, and how they commemorated renowned writers, lawyers, scientists, and more. She showed us the five paintings over the main entrance of the reading room, and how they represented our republic and its potential to collapse into anarchy or go forward into peace and prosperity. Despite having been to this building many times before, I had never learned so much about it. However, even this paled in comparison to the most important aspect of the program: the delegates.

Having grown up in small-town southern Delaware, I was always surrounded by people with goals vastly different from mine. Most of my friends and classmates wanted small, comfortable lives. I, however, always wanted a fast-paced, active life, seeking fulfillment from a career in politics, law, human rights, or something else of the sort. Never had I been surrounded by people with similar goals — that is, until I went to USSYP. Suddenly, I was surrounded by people with hopes just as high as mine, with interests just as intense as mine. It was refreshing to be in a place where my goals didn't make me stand out, but rather made me part of the group.

USSYP was more than just a chance to indulge my inner government nerd. It was an opportunity to connect with people like me, in situations that challenged and educated us. I am so grateful to have been selected to participate in this program, and I hope that it never ceases to bring similar experiences to teens like me.