

Luke Webster, KY – 2019

My experience during Washington Week was one which I will never forget. I was given the unique and distinguished opportunity to hear from and meet U.S. Senators, the secretary of State, the president and many more. Most notably for someone like me who aspires to become a lawyer, we were given the opportunity to interact with the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, John Roberts.

I can still remember when he came into the room on that day. We had all just been briefed on the storied history of the Supreme Court and the chamber. I was admiring all of the ornate architecture which filled the room as well as the amazing friezes which were emblazoned on the high walls. All of the sudden the murmuring, which had filled the room of 104 delegates, fell to an eerie silence. I looked around to see what had happened when I saw a man walking up to the podium from a far door. I almost didn't recognize him without his characteristic black robe. Here came one of my favorite government officials, and I hadn't even recognized Chief Justice Roberts when he came in the room.

Chief Justice Roberts made one of the singular most important decisions that I think anyone made all of Washington Week. Rather than talk about the importance of the Supreme Court or about his own journey, he almost immediately opened the floor for questions. This proved to be amazing, and I collected a lifetime's worth of great quotes and insights into our countries' unique judicial system. One of the nuggets of wisdom which he imparted was that he feels that lawyers have become so engrossed in their profession that they will not take time to serve their community in other ways. Perhaps one of the most important quotes that Chief Justice Roberts was able to give was not one of his own; he gave us a quote by the retired Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. She said to him, "You cannot be indecisive, you just have to decide." The issues before the Supreme Court are of the utmost importance and to paraphrase President Truman, "the buck stops with them." O'Connor's advice applies to areas of our lives as students and as future leaders.

I could not have made it through the week without the help of my 103 fellow delegates. I have learned several lessons from my new family. Among those, compassion, ingenuity, compromise, camaraderie, and trust. That's what made leaving them behind the hardest thing that I had to do all week, because I knew that there was so much more that we could learn from each other and our journey was just beginning.

I'm just so very thankful for the opportunity to hear from so many government officials and leaders whom I have only ever read about in the news, something which was surreal. In particular, President Trump, whom I had covered as a press member last fall, proved to be far more charismatic and congenial in person.

As I move on into my post-secondary education, I will not forget the lessons taught to me by the United States Senate Youth Program. I will continue to use the knowledge that I gained and the opportunities that I was given to their fullest potential. I hope to be back in Washington, D.C. for Washington Week, perhaps as an alumnus, a speaker, maybe even a United States senator.