

Charlie Sosnick, CT- 2015

For whatever reason, you don't really grasp how amazing Washington Week is while you're living it. Maybe it's because you're so busy or so tired or so overwhelmed with once-in-a-lifetime experiences, but it's not until you list everything that you did in one week that you get how great USSYP is. So let's try it:

In one week, I got behind-the-scenes looks at the buildings that house our government, toured the landmarks of Washington, talked politics with 103 talented fellow students, learned about duty and service from exemplary military officers, stood in a room with 80 senators, and heard speeches from the Secretary of Homeland Secretary, the President of the World Bank, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, and President Obama, among others.

Do you get it yet?

The United States Senate Youth Program has had a profound effect on my life and it only happened one month ago. It showed me that government is not a spectator sport. In our country, democracy is not something that occurs behind glass and whose decisions we are victim to. We, the people, stand at the helm of our government. The process only works if citizens stay vigorously involved and attentive. I owe USSYP and the Hearst Foundations a debt of gratitude for getting me up close and personal with my federal government. I would not have learned these valuable lessons were it not for them.

A quote that describes my perception of USSYP was said by Thomas Jefferson long ago. "A debt of service is due from every man to his country proportional to the bounties which nature and fortune have measured him," he said. I've always had an urge to make an impact in the world. But I did not quite know who I should be fighting for. After USSYP, I believe that every person who intends to achieve great things should give some portion of their efforts in service of their nation.

However, the U.S, Senate Youth Program's greatest impacts on my life have been subtle, even intangible. Washington Week imbued me with a deep sense of patriotism, a love for my country beyond anything I had ever felt before. I now make sure to say the Pledge of Allegiance every morning. I sing the national anthem out loud at sporting events. I considered military service for the first time in my life.

The knowledge that USSYP gave me is invaluable. This program allowed me to learn first-hand about our government and country. Reading the newspaper comes with a richer sense of understanding. My studies in Government class immediately call to mind speeches from top-level policy makers. I remember watching an interview with President Obama shortly after I got home from Washington Week. In it, he talked about his visions for American youth and the biggest issues facing our country. It was closely reminiscent of what he told us in the East Room of the White House. That moment cemented not only the magnitude of the privilege bestowed upon me, but the beauty of this country. That a 17-year-old kid can enter the White House and hear the leader of the free world speak is truly an incredible thing.

I would like to extend my complete and heartfelt gratitude to the Hearst Foundations, the United States Senate, and the USSYP staff for giving me this opportunity. I can not imagine a more beneficial experience for young people with an interest in public service. No matter what I do or where I go, I can confidently say that USSYP will be a defining moment of my education.