

Zachary Schroepfer, FL – 2015

Throughout my week with the United States Senate Youth Program the 104 student delegates from around the United States heard from many influential speakers who came from a multitude of backgrounds, political ideologies, and cultural values. Due to the diversity of each speaker's background, we got a very clear but distinct message from each person. However, no matter how distinct; how unique; or how extreme the message was that the speaker was trying to impress upon us, one thing was always clear—the most important thing is to care. For us to be successful in a career, we must care about what we do, for our nation to continue to be a powerhouse in the world, our nation's leaders must continue to care, and for us to be able to fix societal problems, we must care about the people of the world. In short, we learned that caring is the value that will fuel the world's progress.

One speaker that we heard from that truly embodies the spirit of a caring leader was Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia. After looking through the many resources online, I came to discover that he is a very unique person in our political process. This is because he is one of the last senators left of a dying breed, the Blue Dog Democrats. This was a faction of the Democratic Party that became prevalent in politics in the mid 1990s. Some would describe this faction as a group of "conservative Democrats." The reason why this faction is so important, is that the members of this group play a vital role in bridging the gap between the Republicans and the Democrats. Something that we heard so much about throughout our week at USSYP was the problem of party polarization, and how it is worse now than ever before. Because of this, the role of the Blue Dog Democrats has never been so important. Joe Manchin realizes this, and made sure to enlighten us about the many things he has done to help both the Democratic and Republican parties. He shares beliefs with both sides, but the thing he believes in most is keeping America on top of the world's playing field. Every action he takes is what he believes will better America as a whole. When talking about working with his constituents, he even told us that "people don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care."

The President of the World Bank, Jim Yong Kim, was another interesting speaker from Washington Week 2015. Coming to Washington, I honestly did not know what the World Bank was. If I had to guess, I would have guessed that it kept money for a lot of the leading multinational corporations. I couldn't have been more wrong. The World Bank is an organization with two goals: to end extreme poverty in the world and to boost shared prosperity. President Kim educated us on the fact that the World Bank's main goal is not to become a giant corporation, its main goal is to help make the world a better place. This is an organization that truly exemplifies the idea about caring for our society.

As I said before, the main theme that I came away with from my week in Washington, D.C. was that we need to care. For us to improve life for the less fortunate, we must care. We must care about the future, we must care about the world around us, and most importantly, we must care about others. This message is one that has truly struck home with me, and it has fueled my passion for public service more than any other experience that I have ever had.