

Stefan Petrovic, KS - 2015

I came into the USSYP Week arrogantly thinking I knew my fair share about politics, policy and the art of rhetoric. Over the course of the week, I became struck by the massive wealth of knowledge and passion emanating from my peers, Military Mentors, and speakers. By the end of the week I was incredibly humbled and ready for a future of true public service. I came to think like the other side, I learned to come out of my "partisan" corner; I learned to seek compromise while also standing firm in my values; and maybe most importantly, I learned to truly listen to others. I came away with a revitalized faith in the potential of our American political system and was imbued with a new degree respect and admiration for fundamental democratic principles, our men and women in uniform, and the venerable institution that is the United States Senate.

At USSYP week, words of wisdom were ubiquitous and the delegates' questions were nothing short of brilliant. There was no doubt in my mind that I was in the presence of America's best and brightest. On the first day of the program, my Military Mentor told my group "Great men come in clusters." No man or woman is entirely self-made. Success and achievement is built through collaboration, support for others, and perseverance. This idea was echoed by my favorite speaker of the week; Senator Joe Manchin III of West Virginia. The Senator spoke at length about strong action (the greatest injustice is to do nothing), respect for one's adversaries and the purpose of public service. Public service, he said, is not for self-service. Pick your political priorities based on your values and that will take you far in life. This particularly resonated with me and I see that public service can take many forms. No matter what I do in life, I will always carry a sense of duty to the public good.

From listening to a White House correspondent speak on the ever changing media relationship between the press and the presidency to hearing the president of the World Bank discuss micro financing in third world countries, I was astounded by the passion and drive behind these incredible people. Each and every speaker instilled in us a desire to problem solve, work closely together and take risks to make a positive difference. I left this week with new friends from all over the country. We come from all walks of life and have different stances on key issues. We are bound by our love for public service, a respect for civil discourse, commitment to excellence and a craving for knowledge only surpassed by our enthusiasm for the future. I am honored to have been amongst the delegates of the 53rd annual United States Senate Youth Program and I look forward to working with each and every one of them in some capacity over the course of my life. John F. Kennedy once said "As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them." Rather than further utter our appreciation about the USSYP week, we must go out into the world and live out what we have learned. That, is the ultimate thank you.