

Muna Mohamed, ME - 2015

The United States Senate Youth Program was hands down the most influential, challenging, and rewarding week of my entire life. I was given the opportunity to be surrounded by such inspiring individuals who have become my lifelong friends. I am so thankful for the Hearst Foundations because this opportunity has indefinitely shaped me into the leader I am destined to become.

Upon arrival to the Mayflower Hotel, I was unsure of what to expect of this week--- I had skimmed through the list of guest speakers, trying to formulate good questions to ask to make myself sound smart. I was a little bit nervous, but I instantly felt at home when I engaged in such amazing conversations with people I had only known for a couple of hours. Although each speaker amazed me with their addresses, my favorite speakers were Dr. Jim Yong Kim, who gave me a bigger insight in public health which could be a future career path of mine, and Elizabeth MacDonough, who identified such an ignored aspect of congress and government in general--- the lack of representation of people of color. I really appreciated how she unhesitantly pointed out this problem within the people who run our country. Personally, it really empowered me in such a large scale and gave me a bit of hope as a Muslim woman of color aspiring to be in public policy. Thank you Elizabeth MacDonough, for that.

I am a black, Muslim woman living in Lewiston, Maine--- the whitest state in America (although Vermont may have beaten us). All my life, I have been doubted and labeled as loud whenever I choose to speak out against injustice or simple problems within my community. It is hard and tiring. However, I can confidently say that the United States Senate Youth Program, those 104 delegates, Military Mentors, USSYP staff, and, of course, the Hearst Foundations, have given me a strand of hope to continue to make positive changes within my community, state, and nation, while simultaneously fighting the presumed racial, religious, and sexist stereotypes. So, thank you again to everyone that played a role in the 53rd annual United States Senate Youth Program, whether it was the security that always caught us walking without a buddy, or the Hearst family members. You all are the reason why I choose to speak rather than stay silent, and that is something to be immensely proud of. That is how the United States Senate Youth Program changed my life.