

Jonathan Salazar, NM - 2015

“Our government lacks people of color. We need a government that reflects the people it represents” - Senate Parliamentarian Elizabeth McDonough

Growing up as a soon to be first generation college student, I often pondered about the thought “education is the greatest equalizer,” that my peers, family and educators emphasized so much. This past March I had the opportunity to truly see how much power and impact education could have not only have in our future leaders, but also on the world.

In the modern day, education is measured by a mere grade point average, test score or an admission letter to one of the most elite universities. We are taught through textbook, class seminars and often long lectures. But the United States Senate Youth Program empowered and educated America’s future leaders in a way no textbook or lecture ever could; it taught through exposure. Whether being inspired by the President of the United States, networking with some of America’s brightest most talented students or exploring the majestic world that is Washington, D.C., we were constantly learning and exploring the boundless opportunities our nation had to offer.

But beyond all the memorable experiences and all the well-respected elected officials we met, I discovered one thing. Public service is not the opportunity to serve oneself; it’s about hearing your call to help our nation and its people. Not many have the opportunity to be exposed to the nation’s capital and the highest elected officials at such a young age, but the fact that we were selected and had the opportunity to do so must mean we are destined to change the world and the welfare of all individuals regardless of race, culture, religion, socioeconomic background and political background.

The United States Senate Youth Program gave us the opportunity to understand government and its procedures not only to educate, but also to inform about the areas that we, as the future generation, must improve to ensure a better tomorrow for future generations. Change is possible. It is not a goal one must have; it’s a goal one must work for.

The United States Senate Youth Program has inspired me to one day run for United States Senator for the state of New Mexico to serve the community and people who have guided and supported me and to remember to give back to the humble beginnings I once came from. I cannot thank enough all the amazing individuals who made this experience life changing and I definitely have to thank the Hearst Foundations for believing in me and in the other future leaders and for providing us with the opportunity to learn about the change we want to see in our government and nation.