

Lucas Arthur, AK – 2016

The United States Senate Youth Program is, for me, a transformative experience. That's "is" not "was" for it is an ongoing experience — it is far from over. For the 2016 Class, it started long before Washington Week. We were fortunate enough to be able to track down every delegate (through our very effective Subcommittee on Stalking), and add them all to a group chat that started months in advance. We had hundreds of discussions ranging through all manner of topics, and the conversation rarely, if ever, ceased (possibly to the detriment of our school work and sleep schedule). The chat is still very much alive, and there has not been a day, and rarely a daylight hour, when it is quiet.

Arriving at the immaculate Mayflower Hotel felt more like a reunion than an introduction — things started with hugs instead of handshakes — because we all already knew each other so well, and it was the start of an incredible week. Living in Alaska, I was never surrounded with peers who had the same interests or passions that I did, but being immersed into a group of such passionate, intelligent, and driven youth was refreshing and exhilarating. I cannot emphasize this enough: Getting to know your fellow delegates is the most important part of the experience.

When hearing about the inner workings of Washington, D.C. from the outside, the humanity of the politicians is never emphasized. Politicians are characterized by their opinions and not their personalities, and only their most extreme views are newsworthy. It is very easy to forget that they are real people with real lives, and that they are experiencing their own lives just as you are experiencing yours. Another important thing that the news tends to omit, is that common ground is not rare. Many, if not most, policies are common sense, and politicians can come together on them if they so choose.

The Senate Youth Program provides a rare insight into the inner workings of our nation's capital, and it is a truly amazing experience. I am greatly indebted to The Hearst Foundations, to the organizing staff of the Senate Youth Program, to the guests of the program who spoke so compellingly, and to the exceptional team of military mentors who guided us along the way. I hope to maintain my ties with the organization, and to pay it forward, and the program has irrefutably had an irreversible impact on my life and the lives of many others.

Thank you.