

Emma Rook, DODEA – 2017

A person can read numerous newspaper articles on newly passed bills or watch C-SPAN endlessly on the proceedings of a session in Congress to gain insight into the workings of the United States government and how it functions. But this is a view on the outside looking in and not the same as walking the halls of government and seeing how government really operates on the inside. Meeting senators and having face-to-face candid, real-life discussions not only altered my perception of the government, but inspired me have an optimistic outlook of the United States as a whole. The United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) gave me the opportunity to actually meet and converse with people who have changed the world through their contributions and this experience was beyond inspirational.

For me, one of the extraordinary parts of the program was to meet Supreme Court Justice John Roberts. Chief Justice Roberts heads the highest court in the nation where docket selections and split decisions directly influence every American. Generously opening himself up to questions, Chief Justice Roberts started picking on delegates. I raised my hand and when our eyes crossed paths he pointed at me. Momentarily frozen and in shock that he selected me, I stood up and asked my question convincing myself not to faint. I asked "*The fathers of our country believed that the judicial branch was the least dangerous in terms of overpowering the other branches. Today some skeptics are concerned that the court has become too powerful due to the ruling of judicial review in Marbury v. Madison. What is your stance on this newly secured power of the Supreme Court in reference to equality of power in the government?*" It was powerful and reassuring to know that he thought the Supreme Court has exceeded their rightful amount of power. He clearly wants what is best for the country as a whole, rather than power-mongering for his specific branch of the government.

From listening to Senator Cory Booker and taking a selfie with Senator Marco Rubio, to meeting Vice President Michael Pence and President Donald Trump, these encounters have taught me to salute the position, not just the person. Of course, I respected and appreciated every speaker for contributing their convictions and opinions to the delegates. This view was more of a lesson I learned from watching the other delegates and realizing that although some are Republicans and some are Democrats, the United States is still a democracy with checks and balances and these positions should be respected and appreciated regardless of party.

Not only was I blown away by the speakers, but also by the caliber and enthusiasm of the other 103 incredible delegates. To meet such accomplished students, who shared some of the same intellectual curiosities and passions as I do was an uplifting experience of its own. These delegates will no doubt continue to be engaged and have an impact on the future of the United States. Speaking to each person whether about politics or pop culture, I knew they were going to become even more extraordinary in the next stages of their lives. I felt honored to be associated with this group of future leaders, movers, and shakers.

The most common phrase the wonderful staff and organizers of the United States Senate Youth Program, including the guest speakers, uttered was that we would remember this week for the rest of our lives. Now reflecting on the whole week and all the glorious experiences that came with it I can confidently say without any doubt or hesitation that I will always remember Washington Week as one of the best and life-changing weeks of my entire life. I would like to sincerely thank from the bottom of my heart The Hearst Foundations and all the organizers for giving me this wonderful, inspirational experience.