

Kegan Wolfe, ID -- 2018

I will never forget the time I spent in Washington, D.C. as a delegate of the United States Senate Youth Program. The program is truly a once-in-a-lifetime and one-of-a-kind experience that is difficult to describe with words on paper. I am so thankful for the Hearst Foundations and their willingness to provide such an incredible opportunity to the future of our nation. The work that they do is incredible. For me, the experience began when I received the congratulations packet in the mail. I never thought in a million years that I would be selected and sure enough I was. From that moment forward, I spent my time trying to grasp just what it meant to be honored as Idaho's delegate. I envisioned some kind of "camp" like experience where I would play the role of a tourist in Washington. I was so far off the mark. USSYP can in no way be considered a "camp" or "tourist" like experience. From the intimacy with our nation's leaders to the circumstance of the trip, each aspect of USSYP is dramatically unique. Three experiences stand out to me specifically.

The first is the time that I was able to enjoy with our Military Mentors. Interacting with the brave men and women who make it possible for our democracy to flourish has been awkward for me. They've always seemed above conversation and approach. Beyond thanking them for their service I could never really hold a conversation. I will never have that problem again. Our military personnel are exactly like us, they have families, hobbies, talents, senses of humor, and everything else that makes us American. This understanding is something that I will cherish for the rest of my life. It is so critical for our nation to understand the dramatic importance of our military, and the reality that they are people. Too often we forget that behind the combat gear there's someone there. The Hearst Foundations has instilled in me this message, and it is such an important one.

The second experience is our dinner at the National Archives' Rotunda next to our nation's founding documents. I remember walking into the National Archives and becoming ecstatic. Nowhere else on Earth could you find such a priceless collection of American history, and in the heart of it all we were eating dinner. It was such an honor and a privilege to have both a private tour of the Archives and viewing of The Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights. America's history portrays a message of incredible hope and inspiration to so many nations in the world, we must protect that history as well as cherish it. Meeting with the Archivist of the United States in such an incredible setting emphasized to me the importance of record keeping. I want to grow up in a nation that understands its beginnings and I want my children to have that opportunity as well. The feelings that come when you know your past are so wonderful, they provide a catalyst for the future. We cannot ever lose that, I am incredibly thankful for the work that is done at the Archives every single day so that America can maintain its history.

My third experience is our trip to the Supreme Court. It was such an amazing opportunity to hear from Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch. His message was one of hope and kindness. He emphasized to us that it's easy to get caught up in the turmoil of the world and view events through a lens of total dismay. However, the world is not ending - it's better than ever. He further highlighted that you don't need to be the president to have an impact on the world around you. Public service is necessary at all stages and is just as important on the top level as it is at the bottom. It was both relieving and inspiring to hear someone say that. You can be happy and successful even if you're not the best of the best. I feel that his message is truly needed today. My generation has become hypercompetitive to a point where we've lost our sense of clarity. It's become harder and harder for students to feel successful and happy. Justice Gorsuch provided a way to fix that through his message.

Over all, my time at Washington Week as a delegate of Idaho was spectacular. The friends and lessons I learned will stay with me for the rest of my life. I feel so incredibly blessed to have had the opportunity to attend such a prestigious and coveted program. Again, I feel incredibly grateful for the Hearst Foundations and all of those who commit their time to develop the immaculate United States Senate Youth Program. I feel like a better person with a much better understanding of our government because of this trip and hope that I can in some small way take what I've learned and give back to the communities around me.