

Conner Meyer, IN – 2018

Dear Senate Youth Program:

I would like to begin by offering my greatest thanks for what was truly the experience of a lifetime. The importance of the United States Senate Youth Program cannot be overstated to me, and I consider it a profound honor that I was selected to represent my fellow Hoosiers for a week among some of the brightest minds in the country. I owe a great debt to the Indiana Bar Foundation, the Hearst Foundations, and all the staff of the Senate Youth Program for such an enriching experience.

History, government and civic engagement have always been passions of mine. My government teacher can attest to all the days I have spent badgering him after class with nonsensical conversations about anything under the political sun. Washington Week gave me an opportunity to realize that passion. To spend an entire week in our nation's capital with 103 of the most inspiring and intelligent people I have ever been blessed to meet, it is still overwhelming to comprehend. Walking through the halls of the National Archives and up the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, I felt truly tethered to history. In such a prolific city as Washington, D.C., it is easy to begin seeing these places as just regular buildings and worn-out landmarks, but to the 104 of us and our 17 magnificent Military Mentors, these locations were truly ways to connect with the collective unconscious that drives this nation.

It was also a truly unique and enlightening experience to hear so many influential and amazing speakers, from our own Hoosier National Intelligence Director Daniel Coats, to Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin, to the absolutely unparalleled Congressman John Lewis, a civil rights Icon and personal hero of mine. Realizing that these figures crafted a message specially for my fellow delegates and me is something that still baffles me. Throughout these keynote addresses, I heard a variety of messages from Democrats, Republicans, and everyone in between. However, one consistent word persisted above the partisan divide: civility. Something that seems to be lost in today's political discourse, but something that was on full display in the speakers, USSYP staff, Military Mentors, and all my fellow delegates. The ability to disagree without being disagreeable, as one speaker put it, was something that truly served to benefit me throughout Washington Week, and is something that will continue to benefit me throughout the rest of my life.

Even more influential to me than the monuments or the speakers, however, were the others walking through the tours and listening to the speeches with me. The students I met during my short time in Washington were truly the height of intellect, conviction, and moral upstanding. Over dinner, I had an amazingly productive discussion over the nuances of immigration reform. While eating Frosted Flakes at breakfast, I had a respectful and balanced debate over the future of our healthcare system. It is also worth noting that over the course of the week that many of my fellow delegates became personal friends, with whom I shared experiences that will stick with me the rest of my life. I laughed, learned, and debated with these people, and I believe they were the true gift that the Senate Youth Program vested in me.

In just one week, I believe I grew infinitely. On our tours, I walked through the past. During addresses, I listened to and learned about the present. In every interaction with my fellow delegates, I truly saw the future. All of these contributed to a week that I believe will have an indelible impact on my life going forward, and I once again would like to offer my most profound thanks to everyone involved.

Sincerely,

Connor Meyer