

Jamie Roa, MD -- 2018

My week in Washington, D.C. representing the state of Maryland at the United States Senate Youth Program is an experience I will never forget. From the impressive cast of public servants that we had the opportunity to meet and talk with, to our supportive Military Mentors, against the backdrop of historical sites in our nation's capital; all of this made an indelible impression on me. However, the most significant aspect of Washington Week was the bonds that I formed with my fellow delegates. I never would have thought that in just one short week students from all 50 states and two countries could become some of my best friends. Furthermore, some of these new friends will most likely one day be addressing another group of USSYP students as U.S. senators and Congressional representatives; as heads of U.S. government agencies and even as a Supreme Court justice (perhaps that is the role I see for myself)! The value of this experience provided to me by the Hearst Foundations is immeasurable. USSYP was eye-opening to all the opportunities I could have in public service.

My most memorable experience was dining with the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Francisco Palmieri, in the Benjamin Franklin Room of the Department of State. The Benjamin Franklin Room is a snapshot of history. The room looks exactly the way I would envision an 18th century dining room. The gold details on the walls, the American seal on the ceiling, and the many chandeliers that set a very formal tone. In addition to the 18th century décor, the amount of history in that room was astonishing. The room itself is where U.S. officials have hosted diplomats from across the world for decades and crafted international deals. Lastly, hearing Mr. Palmieri speak about his efforts in helping Latin American citizens inspired me.

The most memorable person I had the opportunity to meet during Washington Week was Representative John Lewis. His mere presence in the hallway of the hotel was enough to quiet over 100 teenagers! As he made his way to the podium all of our eyes followed him. The history to which he had not only been witness to, but a significant actor upon, was palpable. The story of his childhood and how he actually wanted to become a reverend and how would practice preaching to the chickens made us laugh. Especially when he said that sometimes the headless chickens were easier to talk to than some of his colleagues. He made us cry when he talked about he came within inches of dying as a teenager when marching for civil rights. I know that had an impact on every single delegate in that room. When I looked around the room at my fellow delegates, no matter their party affiliation, so many of them had tears in their eyes after hearing everything Representative Lewis did for this country and continues to do. He ended his speech to us with a quote that will live with me forever, "When you see something that is not right, not fair, and not just, you have a moral obligation to do something!" Representative Lewis' quote perfectly embodies why I want to pursue a career public service. I want to fight against and reverse the injustices that exist today. USSYP has affirmed my desire to pursue that career path.

My experience at Washington Week cannot be possibly summarized into one essay. I have an entire journal filled with signatures, quotes, notes, and messages from my fellow delegates. USSYP and my fellow delegates taught me that no matter where I come from, no matter what my interests, there is always something I can do in the field of public service.