

Cameron Gehlert, MO – 2018

The United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) is not what I expected. I knew it would be great and fantastic; that is I what applied for, but I had no idea it would be a life-changing experience. I was shocked and made weak in the knees when I opened up the package that announced I was chosen as one of the delegates for the state of Missouri. This was something I had waited four years for and it finally happened. When I actually got to D.C., I was a little nervous. I didn't want to come out of my shell - a proud conservative Republican, rural, Buddhist boy in a sea of spectacular people. Well I did fairly quickly. I said to myself, "if they don't like me, they don't like me." Well, I started being myself later in the evening. To my surprise, people liked me. I have never had a problem with new people or being well liked, but those were Missouri people like me. I was very afraid of saying that I am a Buddhist. Shockingly, no one treated me differently - in fact they were fascinated by my religion. I felt like I met the Pontius Pilate to my Judas. It was amazing to meet someone your own age that could talk politics in an intelligent fashion with you.

Another huge thing for me was the speakers! I saw so many awesome and fantastic people. Seeing Justice Gorsuch was amazing. He was so very very nice and treated us as equals. Or seeing Representative John Lewis telling us about the Civil Rights movement that he was right there and participated in; it really puts history into reality. My personal favorite people to see were President Trump, Vice President Pence, and First Lady Melania Trump. I almost exploded with excitement and happiness to see those three people who have inspired me to never give up and always be you. If an asteroid had fallen and struck me dead I would have died immensely happy.

The Military Mentors were great; the staff was great. The delegates were great. The speakers were great. The sightseeing was great. It would take me innumerable eons to explain how much I loved USSYP and how grateful I am for the experience.