

Andrew Mangan, NY -- 2018

Dear United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP),

To begin this letter, I would first like to offer up a quote that captures a great deal of what I and, I am fairly certain, my delegates truly experienced on our week long excursion to the capital.

*“To view the opposition as dangerous is to misunderstand the basic concepts of democracy. To oppress the opposition is to assault the very foundation of democracy.” — Aung San Suu Kyi*

We see it in our media, we see it on the streets, we see it when we try to have a discussion of politics with a friend or stranger, the hyper-polarization of America is so rampant throughout the U.S it often raises concerns regarding the state of our great union. One of the most important things that I took away from my week in Washington, was that blind disagreement is the worst poison to our democracy. The 103 delegates and I made up an extremely diverse, intelligent, and passionate cohort -- all of the ingredients of some great debates. It was truly amazing to be able to openly discuss tender subjects with delegates who had fiercely contradicting opinions, yet not be afraid of cruel labeling and pre-judgment. Too often in society, when I try to discuss a subject that the other party doesn't agree with, I am faced with a stubborn closed off person, uninterested in listening. Unfortunately, this isn't only in the individual, both major parties, Democrats and Republicans alike are unwilling to hear the others view. Like why some kids felt pressured to march against guns, a view they have the freedom to oppose. Or how some news stations feel that they can't say anything without 'offending' the opposition.

An opposing view is not an offending view, and this idea was by far the most memorable item from my time at Washington week. If I had to choose one theme that was present in every speaker's talk, from Congressman Lewis to Senator Tim Scott or Justice Gorsuch, it was that civility and communication is too precious of an element of democracy to be thrown to the wind. I found it fascinating that even at the highest levels of our government, people still had difficulty communicating their ideas or partaking in a discussion. Another favorite quote of mine from that week was when Justice Gorsuch shared with us, "You can disagree, but you can't be disagreeable." An attitude that amazingly was reflected in every delegate or Military Mentor.

The debates with some of the most intelligent young people our nation has to offer, will unequivocally be my favorite part of the trip. The ability to, late at night, after a day spent traipsing through the hallow halls of the Capitol building, or eating where dignitaries and leaders have made world-changing deals, debate for hours about some of the most complex issues our nation faces, all while remaining fervent and fast friends, is truly a gift.

As far as speakers. It is hard to choose a favorite when our list of speakers included such orators as John Lewis, and some of the most brilliant economical minds of our nation like Secretary Mnuchin, who I was beyond honored to introduce and eat breakfast with.

Our visit to the Pentagon was really something as well. It started off with a solemn changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery. I have only ever watched this activity from the side, so being allowed a view of this historic and symbolic ceremony head on was an experience in itself. I was amazed how at this ceremony we, as one, reflected in thanks on the brave men and women who daily give their lives selflessly so that we can debate whatever matters we want, whenever we want, with whoever we want, with no fear of being silenced. Following the wreath laying, we were driven to the pentagon, which was a cool experience, due to the police escort. The tours through the Pentagon, a building you can never really grasp the breadth of, were demonstrative of the sheer size and complexity of our Armed Forces and national security branches of government. I greatly enjoyed the Q and A sessions with both Director Coats and Deputy Secretary of Defense Shanahan, who both provided invaluable looks into a department that doesn't get much publicity, yet provides such valuable services.

I could go on and on describing my time in Washington, as it truly was surreal. It didn't really hit me how impressive the agenda was until I got home. During the week it all seemed like a dream as we were ushered from one sector to the next, asking questions to the most powerful and influential people in the nation and world. Prior to my week in Washington I was planning on majoring in computer science and work in a software company. However, I have always had an interest in politics and love debating, and following my week in Washington I desire to come back to the capital, in some way or other, more than ever. It is amazing how eye-opening, informative, and life-changing a week can be. I made connections and friends that I know I will never lose as well as meeting the future leaders of our country. It was an honor and privilege to have been able to

represent New York in D.C and I am extremely grateful to the Hearst Foundations and all of the staff that made such an amazing week possible.

*Sincerely,*

Andrew Mangan – NY