

Garrett Geidel, DE – 2019

The United States Senate Youth Program was a life-changing, unforgettable experience. It offered an up-close, behind-the-scenes look at D.C. I was able to eat delicious meals in locations about which I could only dream before. I visited the Capitol Building, the White House, the Archives, and the Supreme Court, all in one week! I was truly spoiled by the Hearst Foundations in every sense imaginable, but I got far more than an absolutely amazing tour of Washington, D.C.

What really made the Senate Youth Program remarkable for me was the many fantastic people with whom I got to interact. Being able to meet people from all three branches of the U.S. government, each with incredible credentials, gave me an unparalleled look into the inner workings of the federal government, and a unique look at the varying perspectives coming from people with different backgrounds and beliefs in government.

The most impactful people I was able to encounter were Chief Justice of the Supreme Court John Roberts, Vice Chairman of the Chief Joints of Staff Paul Selva, and Delaware Senator Chris Coons. Being able to hear from Chief Justice Roberts was fantastic. I was struck by his honesty, I think what stood out to me most were his answers to questions, each one clear and concise. He did not hesitate to take a stance on any question asked of him, decidedly apolitical. He said something special: "See the image and likeness of God in every face," asserting that people must be treated equally, without immediate judgment, and given a natural respect. Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Paul Selva was similarly nonpartisan. He had worked under both President Obama and President Trump and works every day to serve his country as best he can. His ability to speak candidly on international issues, without pressure from media, was a privilege, and gave me great insight into the nature of America's role in the world. Senator Coons impacted me differently. Despite Delaware's small size, I had never had a conversation with him. The opportunity to speak with him for a time gave me an idea of who he really was. He, like any government worker, wants the best for America, and works hard every day to achieve goals for the country. Seeing the achievements of Senator Coons and hearing some of his story inspired me to work harder to positively impact others; as he's modeled, it's truly possible.

In addition to the many phenomenal speakers, each person I met at the Senate Youth Program offered something for me to learn. The Military Mentors exposed me to the true valor of the military service. I was honored to interact with such impressive people, dedicating their lives to our nation, and holding themselves to the highest standard. The other delegates were each fantastic in their own ways, as well. I formed close bonds quickly and found allies for a bright future across the nation. My roommate and I agreed on almost nothing, yet we had great discussions of ideas, late into the night. I ran in the mornings with fellow delegates and made fast friendships and tight bonds around the nation. I constantly heard new ideas and new perspectives. Every meal, I could count on having an intelligent, respectful conversation with someone new about just about any topic, from economics, to social policy, to pop culture! Every interaction I had was a growing experience at the Senate Youth Program.

I am beyond grateful for the opportunities which the United States Senate Youth Program afforded me. Thank you to my senators, Senator Tom Carper and Senator Chris Coons, for supporting me in attending the program. This program shaped me into a stronger American, a more thorough critical thinker, and a better person. I look forward to what the future holds for all of my fellow delegates. I know great things lie ahead for all of us.