

Patrick Chappel, GA – 2019

Sitting here at this moment, I am experiencing such a surreal feeling. I distinctly remember scouring alumni essays on the website for some hidden clue, as if that would somehow improve my chances of being selected. Yet here I am, searching for words to describe the indescribable. How can I quantify the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP)? Thorough pictures? Autographs? A really nice paper towel I may or may not have taken from the restroom of the Benjamin Franklin State Dining room as a way to prove to my friends how beautiful the State Department was? Every experience at USSYP was defined by the unquantifiable. Each day was so unique and allowed me to grow as a leader, a servant, and an American.

I never thought that just a few days in our nation's capital would change my life so much, but I left USSYP an entirely new person. I could write essays on every interaction I had, but I will do my best to summarize what became the best week of my life. Throughout my time at USSYP, I kept a journal of my daily activities, and if you were to take a count of the subjects of each of my sentences, I can promise that about 80% of them went along the lines of, "I can't believe this is happening" or "OMG we saw (insert nerdy American History or Government fact that only a USSYP delegate would go crazy for). Regardless of the particular experience, the overarching feeling was one of undefined humbleness. You know you are somewhere special when you eat dinner next to the Constitution as a great of the United States senator calmly answers questions with the perfect balance of policy and politics.

Despite the difficulty, I would have to say that the greatest speaker, for me, was Sue Gordon, the Principal Deputy Director of National Intelligence. Going in, I never thought of the intelligence service as such an integral part of our government. I saw it as something separated from the rest of our government, yet Ms. Gordon proved to me how vital the intelligence service is to our nation. The substance of Ms. Gordon's meeting was, of course, eye-opening and interesting, but what made this particular experience so worthwhile was the fact that Ms. Gordon did not speak to us as if we were a room of high school students. Her answers were passionate and candid, and at times difficult, yet there was never any attempt to shield or obscure the truth.

Before USSYP, I never saw myself as going further than the community I knew, yet something changes when you are thrust into a new community. A community of this nation's leaders. A community of high achievers. A community of amazing people. The speakers of USSYP were life-changing, the food was life-changing, but nothing will compare to the friends I made. My fellow delegates taught me to believe in myself and filled me with a sense of pride at the fact that a generation which has experienced so much struggle could produce people as caring, dedicated, and fun as the delegates of the United States Senate Youth Program.