

Kevin Drahos, IA – 2019

Even extremely politically engaged students often see a muddled view of the true work public officials complete in their day-to-day schedules. Throughout my week in Washington as an Iowa delegate to the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP), I was able to discover the validity of this statement and peer behind the stained glass that most of America looks through when watching the actions of those who run our government. Washington week was nothing less than the ultimate VIP pass into United States politics. From sitting in the Supreme Court Chamber, talking with Chief Justice John Roberts, to roaming the vast corridors of the Pentagon with Vice-Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Selva, there was no better civic educational experience in my life than the 2019 USSYP Washington Week.

There was no way I could've prepare myself for the life-changing experience I had in Washington. Each of the speakers presented advice full of rich content that I've been able to apply to my personal life, academic life, and social life. With every speaker, my perception of American politics and our world were stretched to new limits. My head began to burst with interest in vast ranges of governmental career paths. I could imagine myself assisting disaster victims like FEMA Administrator Brian Kamoie or working with world leaders to create peace like Secretary of State Michael Pompeo. My options felt limitless and after every guest speaker, I felt a renewed excitement and invigoration to create change through the gift of public service. Each leader brought inspiring personal advice, but each speech was built upon the foundation of an idea that public service is about something bigger than just ourselves, it's about committing to leaving our world better off than when we came into it.

This philosophy was best demonstrated by Italian Ambassador Armando Varricchio when he addressed our delegation over lunch. The ambassador immediately grabbed the attention of every delegate in the room by first addressing one of the biggest issues in our global societies - divisive social climate. We were reminded that we are all part of the same communities and in the end, "we all speak the same language." His excellency continued to speak to the importance diplomacy and the power of peace. Ambassador Varricchio was sure to emphasize that the most important lesson we could take away from his speech is to value the importance of human connections. I was most intrigued by his description of foreign service.

The ambassador expressed the immense amount of negotiation skills, passion, and cooperation that go into foreign service occupations. This ideology was best reflected when Varricchio said, "My job is not to discuss partisan politics, it's about making lasting bonds with other people and discussing what really matters for our world." The ambassador's speech really resonated with my values and I was incredibly star-struck by the issues he was able to solve in his position as an ambassador.

Through all the amazing activities and speakers, the best part of Washington Week continued to be meeting so many other amazing delegates. Their accomplishments and work back in local communities reminded me of the power of the youth voice. I was so inspired by their commitment to creating change which created quite a refreshing atmosphere when contrasted to today's political climate. I cannot thank the Hearst Foundations and U. S. Senate enough for their generosity and commitment to developing America's future leaders. I will take each token of advice with me through every adventure in my budding public service career. Thank you for the experience of a lifetime.