

Preeti Chemiti, ND – 2019

In a singular word, my experience with the U.S. Senate Youth Program was exhilarating. This week-long program not only granted me the experience of a lifetime, but I was even awarded with a \$10,000 scholarship for my postsecondary education at Princeton University. The aims for the program as stated in Senate testimony is "to increase young Americans' understanding of the interrelationships of the three branches of government, learn the caliber and responsibilities of federally elected and appointed officials, and emphasize the vital importance of democratic decision making not only for America but for people around the world." These values of the program reverberated within me as I hosted educational discussions with my fellow delegates, toured national monuments, and was exposed to numerous significant political figures.

A small sampling of the remarkable speakers I met included President Donald Trump, Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Ben Carson, and several more. Every single day, I had the opportunity to interact with these governmental leaders through presentations and open questioning, which is an opportunity that few will be able to receive in their lifetime. I even had the opportunity to meet with North Dakota Senator John Hoeven on Capitol Hill, giving me a direct perspective into his remarkable work for our state and his constituents. Moreover, the 103 other delegates I met left a lasting impact on me. The communication among the remarkable young citizens from across the United States who attended this program is still ongoing, weeks after our time together has ended. This network of individuals truly is filled with some of the most passionate and intelligent people I have ever met and crafting these friendships was one of the best aspects of my week.

While choosing a singular memorable experience to highlight is nearly impossible, a few distinctive aspects of the program stand out. One of these experiences was the opportunity to enter the Supreme Court of the United States. As someone who strives to study law one day, being in the same chamber which our United States Supreme Court justices deliberate on our nation's legal precedents left me filled with awe. In a world that is often filled with hate, particularly with comments among the political sphere, Chief Justice Robert's declaration that he cannot look at a person and hate them regardless of their political affiliations or actions was an ever-present reminder of the necessity to always be kind to others. Furthermore, despite how cliché it may seem, the people I met during this week, from my Military Mentors to the student delegates, made the program as impactful as it was. Hailing from the state of North Dakota, I often find the political parameters of my state to be confining with a one-sided narrative. The dichotomy between my community and the diverse viewpoints I held was a consistent source of tension for me, but I have never had as insightful conversations as I did during Washington Week, which was a refreshing change from what I have been so accustomed to. Overall, the United States Senate Youth Program certainly did prove to be the week of a lifetime. It was truly humbling to be selected and this experience serves as a reminder to always remain involved in my country and the world around me.