

Jacob Bernard, NJ – 2019

All I can remember from the first day was feeling relieved I woke up on time to get to the train station. I remember double checking my list of items I would need for the week. I remember my nerves on edge when I thought about being worthy enough to attend a program of this caliber.

I sat on the train with Garrett (DE) on the way to Washington. This was the first of many conversations where I would be able to learn from someone with different political opinions from my own. When we arrived, we were taken to the Mayflower Hotel in an SUV and it was at this point that I could not believe I was selected to be a delegate.

Of all of our speakers, I enjoyed having the honor to hear from Judge Henry on the 10th Circuit Court and meeting Chief Justice Roberts in the United States Supreme Court. Judge Henry highlighted the importance of the courts maintaining their impartiality and to not allow the partisanship in Washington to influence the courts. In fact, Judge Henry testified on behalf on Justice Gorsuch even though their ideologies did not perfectly align. One of the key points from his speech was that judges take an oath to the Constitution; therefore, they are only accountable to the Constitution.

Once in the Supreme Court, we heard from the Chief Justice. He also highlighted the necessity of maintaining an impartial court. He discussed the idea of precedent and when it is the appropriate time to overturn it such as in cases like *Plessy v. Ferguson*. He even gave personal insight into how he feels he has changed since joining the court and how it is possible to view all cases from both sides' points of view.

This program allowed me to explore new areas in Washington such as The National Archives. In the theatre we were able to ask Mr. David Ferriero about the impacts and importance of preserving facts and knowledge. I could not wait to ask him about his opinion on the movie *National Treasure*. Then, we had dinner in the rotunda with Senator Blumenthal. His response to questions about issues that impact young people such as education, climate, and gun violence was truly inspiring and brought me some hope there could be change one day in the future. He reminded us that we are not the future of tomorrow, but the future of today.

One of our final speakers during the program was one that invoked the most emotion from me personally and gave me the opportunity to realize that the view of bureaucrats I had originally was not entirely accurate. Mr. Brian Kamoie, the Associate Administrator for FEMA, nearly brought me to tears when discussing the influenza outbreak under President Obama that resulted in the death of infants. It was in that moment I realized that our government workers are truly servants who care just as much, if not more than the average citizen.

As expected, no Washington week could ever be complete without a visit to the White House. It was such a privilege to walk through the halls of the East Wing where so many of the greatest leaders in history have walked.

I want to take a moment to thank all the staff from USSYP and our Military Mentors (my heroes) for putting together such an unbelievable program. I especially want to give a shout out to Captain Patrick Lin of the United States Air Force (the best mentor) and our team "Lin-guine".

After taking some time to reflect on my experiences, I have come to find that I was wrong when I predicted which part of the program would be my favorite. While meeting some of the most powerful men and women in Washington was, and still is unbelievable, it does not compare to the honor and pleasure I had when meeting my fellow delegates. The level of knowledge and passion we all shared was truly inspiring. I enjoyed being able to learn about different issues in different states from my fellow delegates. As I said during the town hall with Brian Lamb, I absolutely believe that if there was a Constitutional Convention with all of the 104 USSYP 2019 Delegates that we would be able to solve all the problems our country is currently facing.

This program reaffirmed my hope for the future and it has certainly inspired me to continue down a path of service. It would be a lie to say that I would be surprised to see my fellow delegates in positions of power in future and it would be a dream of mine to be serving right alongside them all.