

## **Morgan Heath-Powers, NV – 2019**

Wide-eyed and full of butterflies, I exited the plane in Washington, D.C. to a sea of bustling travelers and many more polished briefcases and pressed collars than I was used to seeing back home in little Reno, Nevada. Alongside my fellow state delegate I'd just met, our journey to the glistening United States Senate Youth Program shuttle was a complete blur. As the last delegates to arrive that day, we had the whole bus to ourselves. Little did I know, that seatbelt-free chariot would serve as a near-sacred place throughout the week for passionate policy debate, joyful sing-alongs, and sheer excitement amidst our travel between monuments on Capitol Hill and visits with active public servants of our nation.

The electric energy I was met with upon entering The Mayflower Hotel would last far beyond that first night. Crowded around a delicious buffet, spotless white tablecloths, and twinkling chandeliers, I soon discovered that no two delegates, were alike. Some greeted me by asking my name and what I do in school, while others eagerly probed my thoughts on 2020 presidential candidates. Scattered around the room were a collection of pristine military uniforms – the incredible men and women that would not only serve as Military Mentors to myself and my fellow delegates for the week, but would come to be some of our greatest mentors in life to turn to in our future endeavors of diverse, yet widely service-oriented career paths.

It was fitting for the week of engaging speakers and immersion in American government to be jumpstarted by none other than Jack Warren – illustrious historian, executive director of the Society of the Cincinnati, and passionate patriot. He exuded an excitement for American Revolutionary history that can only be described as contagious. His fascinating arguments left our entire cohort of 104 delegates enthralled in historical research, debate, and discussion the entire week.

But taking a step beyond the past to the present, there was not a single speaker that failed to broaden my perspective of the world I know today and how I wish to positively impact it in the future. Rooms fell silent as headline names such as Dr. Ben Carson, Martha Raddatz, Senator Richard Blumenthal, Senator Ted Cruz, Senator Bernie Sanders, President Donald Trump, and many more granted us their time for a riveting speech or memorable photo op.

However, the speakers that captivated me the most were those often left out of the headlines. Deputy Director of National Intelligence, Susan B. Gordon, brought a firecracker-like spirit to the podium, ambitiously answered each and every question with directness and unwavering passion. Her ability to merge insightful facts about national security in the same sentence as an inspiring quote about life opened my eyes to what authentic leadership truly looks like. Not once, not twice, but three times did she remind the audience, “There is nothing better than a life well lived.” From her contagious enthusiasm and matter-of-fact approach to every question we posed, she was unfalteringly true to herself. She left me feeling more inspired than ever to embrace the strengths, weaknesses, skills, doubts, excitements, fears, beliefs, and leadership potential within myself and all those around me as we work toward common goals together.

When we weren't sitting on the edge of our seats to listen to the next speaker, my fellow delegates and I were fortunate enough to traverse nearly every museum and monument that Washington, D.C. has to offer. From the National Mall, to Mount Vernon, to the Pentagon, to the Newseum, to the White House, we were fully immersed in the richness of American

history, national intelligence, legislation, media, and modern-day leadership on the international stage. Most fascinating to me was the National Archives. Chief Archivist, David S. Ferreiro, set the stage for our visit by not only explaining the nature of the National Archives, but by also describing the ways in which it impacts real lives. He told of the time when he once discovered a letter he had personally written to the president of the United States as a young boy. The idea that every letter written to the office of the president has been and will be saved left me even more eager to write one of my own. Soon, we were escorted to the Rotunda where we all rushed to gather about the original draft of the Constitution. Many delegates traced their hands along the glass above the signatures of legendary names – Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, George Washington, and many more of our nation’s founding fathers. We were fascinated at the sight of the Magna Carta and I was particularly awed by a letter written by 10-year-old Fidel Castro to U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt asking for a “real \$10 bill.” It was moments like these that left me with a profound realization that history truly does matter and that we are making it every single day.

During the moments in between – our conversations over the dinner table and our eager banter back and forth across the aisles on the bus – my fellow delegates never failed to teach me something new. One delegate from West Virginia engaged powerfully in a debate regarding climate change and the Green New Deal, offering an insightful perspective on the potential effects of climate change and seemingly proactive legislation on heavy coal-producing states like his. A delegate from Washington told me how at home, she is the only Asian student at her school and that coming to the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) to be surrounded by other Asians was an incredible feeling she’d never gotten to experience before. Together, we celebrated as delegates from Idaho, Tennessee, and California received acceptances to dream schools and military academies. We were all genuinely happy for one another and so excited to see what each and every one of us would go on to do. Through every moment in our debates, diplomacy simulations, C-SPAN Town Hall meetings, and the memories in between, my fellow delegates left me feeling more confident in the future of our nation than ever before. United by a culture of compassion and integrity set by the USSYP staff and our incredible Military Mentors, we were able to address charged topics, share our opinions, and envision a path toward a better future for our nation with respect, curiosity, and passion. We inspired one another and felt inspired, knowing that no matter the career we pursue, the positions we hold, or the causes we support, we are each dedicated to collaborative leadership in service of the United States and of this world. To USSYP, I am beyond grateful. To my fellow delegates, I can’t wait to see you all soon.