

## Colin Sheffer, PA – 2019

“Do your best, and let God do the rest.” Dr. Carson’s words stuck with me throughout the week as we experienced all that the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) has to offer. Questions were created in our minds as we saw, spoke, and listened throughout the week. Most of us seniors, we obviously had a sizeable interest in our government. But where should we let this interest lead us and in what way? Undoubtedly Dr. Carson’s advice seemed to float endlessly in my mind, and it seemed to be some sort of assurance that the right elements will fall into place.

After all, it certainly did for all of us selected for this Washington Week. As for me and my roommate, we hit it off early on. We shared a sense of humor and love for country that would be further strengthened by our time together. And of all of the people I learned from that week, he sits at the top of the list. Truly friends forged by fate, we took on the challenges of the week with fervor.

I listened in awe and with great attention to many of the speakers of the week while journaling my thoughts as we went. Though many were partisan by nature, their keynotes each provided a new piece to the puzzle I was forming in my mind – a puzzle about my future, about our country, and about human nature. The stories of struggle and success seemed to culminate after each speech, only to be repeated or overtaken by the next. But it was not just these big picture ideas that I was most impressed by. It was the respect and honesty we were treated with at each turn. The openness and humility of Chief Justice Roberts when he stated, “I am not much of a symbol of anything,” when asked how it feels to be in his shoes, exemplifies this feeling of respect.

Our Military Mentors played what I think was the largest and most important part of the trip: mentoring the most ambitious students in the country. Mine, a Captain in the USMC played an integral role in shaping me throughout the week. Inspired by his personal story of improvising, adapting, and overcoming, I embraced the idea of success and excellence in all I do. By the grace of God and those around me, I can achieve nearly anything I am willing to work hard towards. In the days after returning home, I have not forgotten this lesson.

Towards the end of the week, we were challenged to describe America with one word. Unquestionably, that word is freedom. People like to talk about change and improvement within our country, but it’s not about any of that. It’s about having the freedom to pursue that change, and it’s the freedom to not pursue that change. It’s the freedom to practice and protect our sacred traditions, and the freedom to move away from them. It is because of our freedom that we can effect the change we see necessary to the wellbeing of our nation. You can go protest in the name of this liberty which we hold dear. And it is this very freedom that enables us to pursue progress as a people. America is something special. We must not lose sight of its founding principles; we must strive to perfect them.

Once-in-a-lifetime, the USSYP is not something that will live in the past. I am continually reminded of the lessons I learned and the experiences I shared with the other delegates. I am forever grateful to them for the welcoming and inspiring week we shared with one another. As President Trump so eloquently stated, I wish that each and every delegate and mentor will “Have a great life!”