

Ben Currey, RI – 2019

The United States Senate Youth Program is a week spent like no other in which one has the opportunity to interact with a group like no other. Throughout this week I had the good fortune of meeting those entrusted with the highest positions of leadership within our nation, those entrusted with its defense, and those who are entrusted with our future. This essay seeks to conceptualize the common thread shared among these individuals and the ideas which they represent through the lens of a boy from small town America.

From those government officials of which we had the honor of speaking with, three main subjects of discussion remain prominent in my mind. The first, comes from Dr. Ben Carson. His claim that the American Dream is for everyone rings in my ears to this moment. The idea that we live in a nation in which every person has the ability to improve their situation on their own accord through their own efforts and perseverance is something which we should all treasure. It would be ignorant of me to say this is the full reality, as was pointed out by a fellow delegate. However, this is the fight that is ongoing; that in which we strive for such an ideal to be realized by all. The next subject of speech was that of our nation's father, George Washington. This speech, given by Mr. Jack Warren of the Society of Cincinnati, served to highlight the life of a true patriot and a relentless dreamer. Washington was described to hold a manner about himself in which any young man could idolize. His character exemplified the ideals of integrity, justice, and grit which allowed him to selflessly lead our young nation in a time in which we were in dire need of a leader. He served no greater purpose than to provide for the future of his nation. This is something which I took to heart. The final realization I made while interacting with these individuals is that when all is over and done with, regardless of political allegiance or background, they are all human beings, just as you and I are. In making this realization, it is easier to accept the views of others, or to realize the figures which you see on TV have much in common. It is acceptable to disagree with someone, but difficult to hate them when you understand you and he are one and the same.

My interactions with the military officers who served as our mentors went far beyond the surface level and were incredibly valuable to me as I am soon to begin my career as a member of the Armed Forces. The level of professionalism and discipline which they embody earned immediate respect from all of us. I had numerous discussions with these officers over every meal, ranging in subject from foreign policy to personal lives to their careers. The most meaningful to me was a one on one conversation during our meal at the National Archives. Over this meal I spoke personally with an officer about the ideas of service and sacrifice themselves. The willingness to give your life for a nation and more specifically the principles which it was founded on is something that not all can understand. It is one that is to be taken seriously and that is hard to convey to those who inquire about it. This desire to answer the call of duty is one which only those who are a part of the Armed Forces share. As I approach the beginning of my career, the conversation that I had reaffirmed my confidence in my decision and helped me to better understand my purpose and desire to support and defend our Constitution and the Americans it protects.

As from my peers, I was more than impressed with each and every one. These individuals are leaders, activists and contributors in their communities and have conquered feats far beyond my own imagination. Nearly everyone was capable of conversation on a personal level while having the ability to maintain composure and confidence while respectfully expressing their own thoughts and convictions. Every delegate came from a unique background, unfamiliar to me and likely far different than the small world which I live in back home. For the first time, I was able to see political and

social beliefs displayed from all over the United States and put a real person with them. I made the observation that many of these beliefs were based in the culture and people of which they were exposed to on a daily basis. These students were advocates for the people of their home lands. They took pride in where they came from and sought to represent their towns and cities and states to the best of their ability, taking care to look out for the well-being of their friends and neighbors. I am humbled to have been associated with such an outstanding group of individuals and am proud to have called them my peers.

Service. Sacrifice. Patriotism. These are the ideals which I believe best represent those who were a part of my week in Washington. Most of these individuals may never be the president or a politician or a service member. However, they will always be there to serve those who are in need of them. These young men and women from all over the country have shown a commitment to the improvement of their communities and their country. Ronald Reagan once said "Where do we find such men? We find them where we've always found them, in our villages and towns, on our city streets, in our shops, and on our farms." These folks are no different; average Americans who do extraordinary things. They are our future, they are the ones who will change our country for the better. They are serving our nation in any way that they can, from the smallest of acts to the largest of labors. These young patriots all share a common desire for the betterment of our nation and a common calling. I take solace in knowing they are here for us, ready for the day in which they are called upon to lead us.