

Samuel Hiner, NC – 2021

The United States Senate Youth Program was an unforgettable experience that has greatly inspired me and shown me how much one can accomplish through government. Listening to speakers throughout our government who have each had a positive impact on our country inspired me and showed me how I can make the world a better place in my life.

Justice Clarence Thomas stressed the importance of independently determining your values and sticking to them. Quoting to us “live not by lies,” Justice Thomas explained how if something is important to you, it is worth thoroughly understanding and reaching your own judgment based on the facts. While there is room for compromise, you should never compromise on what you believe for the sake of conformity. DHS Distinguished Chair of Leadership Brian Kamoie related a similar story from another Supreme Court Justice. Justice John Roberts used to have donuts in the waiting room for interviewees for a Supreme Court clerkship. Any clerk who had the self confidence to take a donut just before this important interview would be immediately hired. The idea is that clerks should not feel scared of being judged for something they don't see as wrong. The importance of knowing what you believe and committing to your values and yourself even when faced with opposition cannot be understated.

Many of the speakers in the program had what could be called a radical commitment to their values. Taking the Justices' advice, they had an uncompromising commitment to their core ideals about how the world should be. This also means taking the fullest advantage of every opportunity they had to make the world better. Senator Tammy Baldwin first ran for office when she learned how the County Board of Health excluded college students from their uninsured protection program. Seeing something wrong with the way these students were excluded, she focused on what she could do to change it and make things better. Senator Baldwin repeated this pattern in the Senate, and she was instrumental in the creation of the provisions of the Affordable Care Act allowing people to stay on their parents' insurance plan up to 26 years old. By having strong beliefs and focusing on making a difference when she had the opportunity to do so, Senator Baldwin has had an incredible positive impact on the world in her life.

Even with this confidence and belief in yourself and your ability to change the world, it is also important to retain an open mind. As National Climate Advisor Gina McCarthy explained, public service is a collaborative effort with the people you are serving to find solutions. You cannot enforce your own solutions. While you need to be confident in your beliefs, having an open mind and finding compromises and solutions is incredibly important to make progress. This process is also easier than one might expect. While our differences may seem great, we all share many of the same common values and want the best for our community, country and the world. By communicating on the level of those values, Gina McCarthy has been effective in helping the country improve on environmental issues.

Finally, Astronaut Scott Kelly summed up what makes an effective mindset well - focus on what you can control. He related how the first time he went into space, he did not notice what it looked like to leave the atmosphere. Instead, he was focused on the control panel in front of him, making sure he did as good a job as possible with the aspects of the mission that he could control. In a similar way, everyone we met with focused on doing the best they could with what they had control over. In the case of everyone we met with, continuously putting a good-faith, intentional effort into whatever task was before them led to them being given opportunities to have an even greater impact, and they were all able to make a real difference on issues that matter. Learning from each of these speakers has inspired me and strengthened my commitment to make the world a better place during my life by pushing to improve public policy.