

The United States Senate Youth Program has most certainly been one of the defining experiences of my life. At the beginning of the week, the alumni foretold what a life-altering time the program would present, yet I substantially underestimated the vast extent to which Washington Week would change me as a person. I was in the company of the most incredibly intelligent, humorously witty, and tremendously courteous group of high school students in the country. Furthermore, the military mentors were outstanding, passionate, and informative, and they enthusiastically answered our questions and marvelously narrated their adventures. Each mealtime never failed to present delectable food, interesting intellectual conversation, and wonderfully eloquent speakers. To top it all off, we were treated to fabulous tours, stunning musical concerts, and beautifully moving sites that have left an indelible mark on my mind, and even on my soul.

At this program, both the quantity and the quality of the speakers astounded me. I often found myself flabbergasted at the combined down-to-earth veracity, enjoyable sense of humor, and remarkable articulacy of the speakers, whether they were senators, justices, secretaries, ambassadors, or my fellow student delegates. My favorite speakers were indubitably President Barrack Obama and Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. President Obama's outstanding vigor, inspiring enthusiasm, and solemn words of wisdom penetrated into the deepest corner of my soul. Standing on the steps outside the White House, gazing upon my president as I stood awe-struck beside those who had instantaneously become some of my best friends in the world, I witnessed first-hand the simultaneously charismatic and sincere person who is our most esteemed President Barrack Obama. Additionally, Justice Ginsburg, the Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, displayed her vitality in her energetic and powerful speech, proving that she has retained her spunk, despite her pancreatic cancer surgery.

A highlight of the program for me was the incredibly eventful itinerary that the benevolent Hearst Foundation prepared for us. The Hearst Foundation must have known that 104 of the most ambitious students in the nation appreciate absorbing as much knowledge and experience as possible every day. We were treated to a broad array of tours, each unique in the feelings it provoked and information it conveyed. I had never been to Washington, D.C. prior to the United States Senate Youth Program, so I was naturally amazed to see all of the wonders of our nation's capital city, including the White House, Capitol, Supreme Court, Gallery of the United States Senate, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial, Pentagon, and Newseum. A unique experience that I had not anticipated was the opportunity to tour the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and listen to a breathtaking concert of the National Symphony Orchestra. Playing in an orchestra myself, I was astounded by the loveliness of both the intricately decorated concert hall and the sonorous music.

The opportunity to interact with such a diverse group of students was remarkable. I am from the Wonderful State of Kentucky, and my closest acquaintances were from the Admirable States of Oregon, New Jersey, Hawaii, Louisiana, Michigan, and Wyoming, to name but a few. Every delegate came from a different background and had a different life story. While we all shared certain characteristics, such as ardor and dedication, we also had our own eccentricities that made befriending one another all the more interesting. I have been forever inspired by the achievements, goals, and personalities of my fellow delegates. The United States Senate Youth Program was undeniably a life-changing experience that has broadened my horizons and encouraged me not only to dream more fantastically, but also to fervently set out to realize those objectives.

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