

The greatest thing that USSYP does is pose a challenge to all 104 lucky recipients. I have been challenged by the Senate Youth Program to change the world. Not in a Charlemagne "get your name in the stone wall of history" kind of way— I think changing the world stems from smaller, more sincere actions rather than grandiose intentions.

Through our week in Washington, we met public servants. We were dazzled by the titles, the pomp, and the grandeur, certainly. But the amazingly stark truth is that every single person we met had a large degree of humanity. It wasn't the mystique of President Obama that charmed us, but his comforting candor and affable aura. Nor did Justice Ginsburg leer at us from her ivory tower— to the contrary, her podium stool endeared us as much as the sincerity with which she spoke about the plain struggles of love. Imagine that. Between the unison chair-scrapes and standing, and orchestrated clapping, Justice Ginsburg talked to us about love, Loving, and a little bit about Virginia.

To those that took the time to speak to us: your humanity and humility made us love you, even as it toppled you from the imaginary pedestal in our minds into tangible life.

Yet, every person that gave time to meet with us in Washington made me question my self-worth even more. Was it really the best use of the President's time to shake my hand? Didn't Director Leiter have terrorists to foil? Couldn't Chairman Bair be saving the world— erm, economy? No— these people met with us because they thought we were important. Somewhere along the line, they decided that talking to a group of 104 high schoolers was the best use of forty minutes on a Monday morning.

I thought for a while there was a mixup. Hmm? You want to talk to the kids that are going to change the world? I think you meant to see that girl, over there... Certainly not me. However, it is just now dawning on me that for these public servants, they care about everyone. They don't just want to talk to USSYP. They want to talk to all high school students. To tell them to stay in school, not do drugs, maybe even to fall in love. In time, these big names and powerful titles will fade. The fearless leaders we met will shrink from the headlines, into the textbook pages, and finally nestle themselves comfortably into the index of history. But for me, these memories will stay fresh.

And that gives me a charge. A burden. I have to prove it. No, we all have to prove it— prove that their time was well spent. That their words not be wasted, nor their sincerity rebuked in favor of sarcasm. Obama wishes he could spend time with every person in the world and befriend them. But he can't. He's just one man. Guess what: we're not. We're 104 people that have been blessed with every advantage. And the worlds' greatest public servants took time to tell us just how fantastic they think we are for a reason: they want us to understand when they take time to talk to us, that we need to pass that donation of time on.

To the naysayers, who are even now rolling their eyes at my words and inking up their "Trite" stamps— don't do it. Don't succumb to the cheap bauble of cynicism when treasures exist if you help and care about people. If nothing stuck, and all of USSYP was just a feather in your cap or a line on your resumé, then our guest speakers, military mentors, and everyone involved wasted their time. But if you can forge yourself anew towards a commitment to service, then you're changing the world. Do good, and do it well.

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