

## U.S. Senate Youth Program Essay

As I reflect back on the week I spent in Washington, I am overwhelmed by amazing memories that I know will stay with me for the rest of my life. Putting these memories down on paper is almost impossible because words can not express how grateful and blessed I was to embark on such a life-changing journey. From the beginning of the application process for USSYP, I felt that I really did not have that great of a chance of being selected. However, when I received the information packet in the mail and read over what the week would be like, I knew that I would be in for a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

While preparing for the trip, I was filled with excitement at the prospect of meeting the President, a Supreme Court justice, and countless other well-known public officials. In addition, I looked forward to meeting students from every corner of the country. I knew that these fellow delegates would also be people with a love for government and public policy and that we would surely connect with one another on a deep level. As my bags were packed, and I woke up on the morning of March 7<sup>th</sup>, the trip I had been planning for a month was finally beginning. Luckily for me, the other delegate from South Carolina was also from Charleston, and we talked continually on the hour long flight to the nation's capital. Our conversation was one of uncontained enthusiasm as we discussed how we were embarking on one of the greatest weeks of our lives. At last, when flying over the city into Reagan airport, I felt that this city was where I was supposed to be.

When I walked into the Mayflower Hotel, I was awed at how the Hearst Foundation would go to such great lengths to make this week one of the most memorable experiences of my entire life. I will never forget the true public service and wonderful generosity that the people at the Hearst Foundation displayed in their efforts at giving America's next leaders a taste of how our government works. By looking at the agenda for the week, I knew that I was in for a whirlwind immersion in the actual functions of the U.S. government. I could not have felt more fulfillment, because I knew that I wanted to major in political science, and one day serve in Congress. From this all-access pass to the behind-the-scenes workings of the government, I felt a confirmation that public service was what I was supposed to do with my life.

Every activity was memorable during Washington Week. Whether it was eating breakfast with my military mentor, touring a famous monument, meeting a distinguished official, or simply hanging out with my fellow delegates, I was learning valuable lessons. However, out of all the activities, a few stand out in my memory for the impact that they left on me. The trip to the Holocaust Memorial Museum on Sunday was a deeply moving experience that made the atrocities of the Holocaust all the more real in my mind. Seeing the actual possessions of the Holocaust victims was a poignant lesson of the evils of hatred. The trip to the Supreme Court on Monday brought my government class to life. I had just covered the Supreme Court in class, and sitting in the marble courtroom made me reflect on all the cases that had been argued before that very bench. Meeting Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg was another once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. It is not every day that one gets to meet a Supreme Court Justice. Although I did not personally agree with Justice Ginsburg's judicial rulings, it was eye opening to hear the process for making a decision on a case. The pinnacle of the week came on Wednesday, when we went to the White House and were greeted by the President of the United States. I never thought that I would be able to meet a president, and as I shook the President's hand, I knew that I wanted to be in politics. Thursday morning's breakfast with C-SPAN President Brian Lamb was very enjoyable. I found Mr. Lamb's positive opinion of partisan news networks and his message of the necessity to hold our public officials accountable very enlightening. One of my absolute favorite places in Washington is Arlington National Cemetery. As our coach pulled up and we stood in the lightly falling snow amidst all the white tombstones, I felt so strongly for the ideals that America has fought for over the past 200 years. I could have stayed and watched the procession at The Tomb of the Unknowns all day. Touring the Pentagon was another opportunity that not many Americans get. My respect for the armed services and the tough decisions that our military leaders must make every day grew immensely on this tour.

Aside from all of the amazing sights I saw and people I met, getting to know my fellow delegates is something that I will always remember. All of us were so compatible in our shared passion for public policymaking and government. The conversations that took place in the Colonial Room at night were some of the most interesting conversations I have ever had. All of us were so unique and we learned a great deal about each other as a result of this wonderful trip. Getting to know about life in other areas of the country was also one of the most interesting things about Washington Week. These intelligent, passionate, young leaders are now my friends, and I know that in the future we will all be working on solving our nation's problems together. When reflecting on Washington Week, I can not forget the food. The chef at the Mayflower prepared some of the best meals I have ever had and with each meal I was served, I was continually amazed. I also can not forget the heroic military mentors that really made Washington Week possible. My mentor, Captain Jonathan Bissell, was a true American patriot who fought for the ideals that America was founded upon. All of the military mentors were prime examples of how service to one's country is one of the most admirable things a person can do. I will particularly cherish my memory of seeing the human side of the military. The military mentors were very intelligent, had families, and told many stories that I will never forget.

As the week came to a close on Friday night, I had the privilege of watching the flag folding ceremony with immense honor. While watching the military mentors fold the flag that symbolizes our nation, my heart was filled with pride that I have been so blessed to live in the United States. I knew in that moment that the week I had just experienced would stay in my memory for the rest of my life. I would take the lessons I learned over the course of the week and apply them to my own life, and my future political ambitions. Words can not express my gratitude at being given the opportunity to experience Washington Week. I know that as a result of this trip, I grew as a person and that this trip has left a profound impact on my life. I wish to express my appreciation for everyone who had a part in making this week possible.

Thank you,

**Seth Bostrom - SC**