

Haley Jones – IL

I never expected to get chosen for this program. I just didn't think the odds were in my favor. I awaited the release date of the application and then dragged my feet for weeks before deciding to fill it out. And once I did, I almost didn't mail it in. Luckily I did, because six months later I found myself seated on a plane with my co-delegate anxiously talking about the week ahead of us. We touched down in D.C. and I honestly thought we were going to pass out with excitement. As I arrived at the hotel, I was overwhelmed by my fellow delegates. I digressed from my usual loud and abrasive self, and just sat and absorbed. As we sat and frivolously debated that first night, we couldn't even fathom the myriad opportunities and intelligent speakers that we had still to come. I spent the better half of the week pinching myself, ensuring this wasn't some fantastic dream.

After writing the introduction for this essay, it's hard for me to decide what to write now; just as it's been hard for me to tell people about this week. The words I use are generally, "Obama", "Surreal", "Coolest thing ever". And then I stop. How do you describe a truly life changing event? All of us delegates have done the weeklong leadership conferences, Girls State/Boys State, HOBY, basically you name the "life changing experience" and we've done it. But this was different. Basically the faction of my persona that I care about the most was replicated in 103 people. But not in a monotonous way, because the diversity among us budding young leaders was remarkable. But reflected in each of us was the passion to make a difference, the drive to cause reform, and the heart to be courageous. It's an unreal thing to be a part of. While everyone there had applied to the top colleges in the country and likely candidates, that happened haphazardly. This essay was supposed to be about the speakers we had, but for me that was not the most memorable part of this week. It was the people I met, the conversations I had, and the relationships I formed.