

Mitzel, John – ND

For the better part of December, I remember rushing home from school to check my mail, hoping for a letter from the USSYP. When I finally got it, I was beyond ecstatic, but not for the reasons which I am now. When I first got my letter, I was thrilled to receive the scholarship and to win a trip to Washington. The knowledge and friendships that I would acquire never really crossed my mind as a reason to be excited.

When I first arrived at the Mayflower, I was totally prepared for the normal “awkward” period that tends to come when large groups of teens meet each other for the first time. Oddly enough, I was in discussion with others far too quickly for that thought to even cross my mind. By far, my favorite party of Washington Week was the opportunity to interact with some of the brightest students from around the country. We could debate hot, contentious issues, and then walk away, still having respect for one another and being great friends. The free time and discussions with the Senate Youth kids, whether it was on the bus or in the evenings, were among the most memorable experiences from the week. In one week, I became best friends with my roommates, small-group members, my bus, and all of the others! Never before have I built such strong friendships so quickly.

The first speaker we had, Judge Robert Henry, left on me one of the most profound impacts of all of the week’s speakers. I found him particularly fascinating because of his ability to intertwine moral philosophy with real-world scenarios, all while explaining it to a room full of teenagers. He was humorous, intelligent, and able to relate to us in ways that many of the other speakers struggled to. I hope he is able to return to future USSYP classes.

My favorite location to visit was the Supreme Court building. This location had the greatest impact on me because of the sheer density of history that had taken place. Thinking of all the world-changing decisions that had happened in that room was a bit mind-numbing. Having the opportunity to listen to Sotomayor speak was phenomenal. From the moment she walked in, she treated us in a motherly manner and acted genuinely excited to have us there. While maintaining her professionalism, she was able to delve into her personal life and history, while giving us great answers to our questions. Meeting with her was a truly remarkable experience.

Trying to give the highlights of Washington Week in a few paragraphs was a very difficult assignment. The experiences we had can hardly be described through words, let alone through just a few of them. Interacting with the delegates truly helped me grow as a student, a leader, and as a person. The leaders and speakers we were able to meet with still blow my mind; it was a once in a lifetime experience, and one that very few ever have the opportunity to have. Washington Week brought us to our nation’s capital, immersed us into government, and introduced us to the brightest youth in the country. I know I am not alone in saying that Washington Week changed my life forever.