

Hunter Brunwald [OK]

“Don’t spend your time thinking about what you want to be; spend your time thinking about what you want to do.” – President Barack Obama

Best. Advice. Ever.

It’s so difficult for me to try to phrase such an out of body experience as this! I keep thinking back on the many significant and personal moments we witnessed, not only with our various speakers, but also with each other.

What I think I really admired about this program was the degree on access we were given to each of the speakers, people who are the real movers and shakers in our government. How many people can say that they’ve heard Associate Justice Sonia Sotomayor refer to herself as “still Sonia”? How many people heard the passion in Senator Byron Dorgan’s [D-ND] voice when he said the Supreme Court was “desperately, desperately wrong” on the issue of corporate campaign finance? How many people have been able to dine in the Benjamin Franklin State Dining Room in the State Department? How many people were able to hear, firsthand, the Parliamentarian of the US Senate explain the process of reconciliation during a historic healthcare debate where the procedure would ultimately be used to have it passed? How many people have walked up the front steps of the White House to meet the President? I can think of 104 *high school students* who have.

And those 103 others, I’m sure, were the absolute greatest part of the entire experience. They were exceptional people I know I definitely overlooked before I arrived in DC. When I heard I had been chosen as a delegate for Oklahoma, I was ecstatic about the opportunity to meet the high ranking members of the government, and while I’m still incredibly awestruck by them, I’m equally as awestruck by my peers. I know I’ve made incredible friendships I’ll cherish for a lifetime, both in my college life and my career field.

But don’t just take my word for it. I think my friend Nikhil Lakhanpal from Georgia phrased the week best:

“When you take kids from all across this country, and you put them in a setting like we just had, you erase all political, ideological, and socioeconomic backgrounds, to create a unity that you can never experience. It provides a surreal perspective as to how, under the influence and under the guidance of this one leader [President Obama], we can join together and form a cohesive union that is otherwise absent from our great nation. And to be able to be a part of that was definitely one of the most awesome moments of my life.”

USSYP has been one of the most awesome moments of my life, and I can only hope the program continues to inspire young minds in the future to lead a life in public service, as it has for me. THANK YOU!