

Sacks, Joseph – RI

In March of 2010, the red carpet was rolled out for the Hearst Foundation and the 104 United States Youth Program delegates. This experience is known as Washington Week. When I found out that I was awarded this scholarship, that's all I thought of it as; a scholarship. The Washington Week seemed to be a bonus, a nice week off of school to visit our nations capitol. I did not know that week would be the catalyst for the inspiration I am currently feeling.

I dedicate my inspiration to my fellow delegates, who were, without exception, the most amazing kids I know. The tone for the week was set the minute I walked into Colonial Room in the Mayflower Hotel. The sound of passionate voices discussing our nations most pressing issues dominated the room. It would foreshadow our group's intense and spirited nature. I was able to add my two cents to the debate, and although some disagreed with me, they did so respectfully. We were even able to move towards a resolution to the problem that we could all agree on. The seventeen military mentors in addition to my peers created an enthusiastic environment that was truly contagious. Nancy Erickson, the Secretary of the Senate, told us to "surround yourself with people who are smarter than you." I will remember that advice for the rest of my life as I continue to keep in touch with the kids to whom I shared that week with.

About half way through the exhilarating week of non-stop VIP access, I had a revelation about what we were witnessing. We came to Washington D.C in the middle of the health care debate. We were able to take what we heard from different speakers around the city with us, and everything was able to come full circle. We were privileged to be an audience for the man who would decide if the health care bill would be able passed by reconciliation, Alan Frumin. We then met with the men and women who would vote for the bill; in the many Senators we were able to talk to. We then stood in awe and watch the driving voice behind the legislation and the man would eventually sign the bill, President Obama. At last we were able to converse with the women whose department would execute and administer that law when it was put into effect, Kathleen Sibelius. These are the members of our government that would each do their part to change our lives. We were treated by the Hearst Foundation, but for good reason.

My generation is going to lead our nation in a pivotal moment in its history. In Washington, the most powerful people in the country met with our group. Their demeanor did not reflect their superiority over us, but instead it reflected their hope in us. They understood what we did not at the time, that we would be the ones to fill their shoes. We must be educated and trained on how to advance our country and the world. The Hearst Foundation and the United States Senate Youth Program did just that. It told us that leadership is not position; it is action.