

Breuer, Matthew – VT

The United States Youth Senate Program was the single best experience in my life. As fortunate as I had been to be a part of so many wonderful experiences prior to Washington Week, the program put on by the Hearst Foundation changed me so profoundly that I cannot imagine having not attended.

I could talk about meeting heroes of mine like Senator Dorgan or Justice Sotomayor, but I won't. Don't get me wrong - their presentations were utterly captivating, and I cannot express how ecstatic I was to be able to ask them each questions. But while it would be easy to talk about the messages I learned from their presentations, when I think back on Washington Week, those question and answer sessions will not be what sticks out most in my memory.

What I'm going to remember is the people. At any gathering of top-flight students, their stories and talents are bound to impress you, and USSYP was no different. By the end of our first day, I was already in awe of other's abilities, and very quick to doubt my own. I felt like I'd just been dragged out of Vermont's Green Mountains and thrown into a dinner-time conversation that I'd been missing my whole life. It took no time at all to understand that I was among people who will go on to do incredible things, and in turn I experienced a sense of renewed obligation towards making the most I can out of public service. But as much as I loved the debates and arguments, they still will not remain the lasting memory for me.

Friendship will be my defining memory of the United States Senate Youth Program. In seven hectic days, whilst being herded from one location to another amid this sea of delegates, I was able to move beyond "Hi, Matthew Breuer, Vermont" with some people and actually get to know them. Given the pacing of the week, that alone is a significant feat.

But the friendships I formed during Washington Week were far more than just connection of convenience and mutual interest. Whether it was during the wait for an evening guest to arrive, the time spent packed into rows on my bus, or sprawled out across a Colonial Room table just before having to head to sleep, I was completely captivated by the people I was with. Not only are my fellow delegates the brightest people I have ever met, they were genuinely the most interesting people I have ever encountered.

Upon returning home, I came to the stark realization that some people who got to know me over four days knew me far better than friends I'd known since kindergarten. I found myself driven more than ever to give back in any way I can to my community before I take off for college. And the most surprising realization for myself was that I felt this immediate need to travel and see the people who I had only just said goodbye too. It's difficult to explain a connection that strong, and I doubt I can do it justice here. But ask anyone of the 104 delegates, and I am positive that they would know exactly what I mean.

We are destined to share that relationship amongst ourselves, un-understandable to the outside world and incredibly dear within our own. That gift - this incredible sense of belonging to an impossibly impressive community - is the best thing any program could have ever done for me. For that alone, I will never forget the week I had in Washington.