

Ladies and Gentleman, may I have your attention please:

Looking back upon my week as a delegate to the 49th Annual United States Senate Youth Program, I try to envision all of the memories from that extraordinary week like one of those good dreams you don't want to wake up from. It was both an honor and a privilege to be invited to attend such a first-class program as is the USSYP, and meet some of the greatest people that truly make our country great. I am of course talking about Mrs. Rayne Guilford, Mr. Steve Cox, Mr. Jakub and Mrs. Erin Mosur, the Hearst Foundation, all of the program staff, all of our military mentors, and the 104 student delegate from all over the country and the globe.

I believe it would only be fair to start recounting this week with its true beginnings on January 20th, 2011 when I became a member of the "USSYP 2011" Facebook group. To say this group is active is an understatement. I soon became acquainted with Kevin Saucedo-Broach of Maryland, Ariel Zlatkovski of Alaska, Samantha DeRidder of Wisconsin, and K. Anthony Fitten of the "Great State" of Iowa. These acquaintances soon became friends through today's blessing of technology, and this only built the anticipation for Washington Week.

As my flight landed at Regan National Airport, I promptly met Lt. LaTondra Sapp and Lt. Calvin Young of the Army. After speaking to such outstanding individuals and observing the leadership and pure civility illustrated by these officers after our coach bus was involved in a car accident, I was truthfully proud that men and women of character protect our country.

Settling into our gorgeous 4-Diamond luxury (definitely an understatement) hotel, I finally realized that yes, this is real, and I am about to embark upon an experience of a lifetime. As I met my roommate Nicolas Pease of Nebraska (which conveniently rhymes with Alaska) and my military mentor, the great raconteur Capt. John Brownell of the Nevada Air National Guard, I knew I would be surrounded by great individuals all week.

Washington Week progressed, and I soon met the likes of Sen. Ben Nelson, retired Chief Circuit Judge Robert Henry, Sen. John Cornyn, CIA Director Panetta, Maj. General Joseph Alexander, and not to mention meeting President Barack Obama and Senators Marco Rubio, John Kerry, Joe Manchin, and Kal Penn all in one day! Equally as important, I also got to justly meet the likes of Scotie Connor of Oklahoma, Meg MacInnes of New Hampshire, Cody Lind of Nevada, Robert Locke of Massachusetts, Braydon Jones of Texas, Mr. George Irish and Mrs. Jeannie Irish.

I was honored to meet such intelligent people from across the country of all ideologies and backgrounds. I enjoyed discussing health care with Justin Jagodinsky of Wisconsin, immigration with Californian Iktae Park, party organization with Jordan Rammuson of Minnesota, and 2012 Presidential Candidates with Florence Chen of Indiana. Furthermore, I don't believe any USSYP group will ever rock the house as we did with the dancing prowess of Kyra Ellis-Moore of New Mexico or Kentuckian Corey Eldridge's beautiful rendition of "Goodbye World Goodbye" on the piano. I was honored to be associated with such gentleman as are Allen Lollis of South Carolina, Jackson Pruett of Alabama, Chas Uffleman of Tennessee, James Konksy of Illinois, and Robbie Lauf of North Dakota. Not to mention such charming ladies as are Madison Ashley of Louisiana, Emily Brixey of Oregon, Vivian Wang of Ohio, and Molly Cain of Delaware to name a few. Yet no one will ever be better examples of the value of virtue than our 17 military mentors.

Walking the halls of the United State Capitol with Lt. Commander Michael Files (US Navy) or walking to the National Gallery of Art with Mr. Cox are great memories with extremely professional gentleman that I will forever cherish; as will be that last dinner with Braydon Jones and Scotie Connor, and noticing Jakub and Erin dance in the upper balcony to our final slideshow. The nostalgic reverence I hold for the week of March 5th to March 12th is the purest compliment I can give to every moment I spent as a part of the program. As we scurried from place to place on our amazing agenda, I began to feel a part of something big. I began to look around not only at the view of the US Capital, which could be seen just about anywhere, but at the extraordinary people around me.

As the week ended, I wish I could stay in D.C. with all 104 for just another day, just another week. But it was at that moment that the true meaning of Washington Week hit me like a thundering train. We are all meant to go back to our family and friends and take the lessons of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas and to honor the sacrifices of those buried in Arlington National Cemetery by giving back to our communities. Washington Week provides us an outstanding experience which is meant to help us one day to be our future Senators who can truly lead and can put our country first. To end this essay and to summarize Washington Week, it seems fitting to end with the consistent ending from the golden voice of Mr. Cox stating, "This concludes the 49th Annual United States Senate Youth Program", but it is not the end, ladies and gentleman, it is just the beginning.