

Chase Blasi – KS - 2011

Washington Week 2011 is a week that 104 people will never forget. A week in which every state in our nation was represented by some of the most intelligent and energetic youth of our nation. The youth came from totally different backgrounds and upbringings. Such diversity it was, a perfect image of our beautiful nation. Although differing opinions ranged from all issues, respect and dignity was ultimately upheld by those discussing the very issues our nation face every day. I had one image of our government before I came to DC, for the first time this past March, broken. But I ultimately found the opposite; I found friendship among the members of Congress no matter their party affiliation. This very enriching experience will be an experience I will always be grateful for and I shall use this experience to better my community, state, and nation.

Newly elected Congressman Gardner of Colorado, a USSYP Alumni himself, said it perfect when he said "You are not here to be part of history, but to make it". That is a quote I'll cherish forever, something that truly was inspirational to me; encouraging me to possibly enter public service in the future. Another notable speaker was Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, a very charismatic man. His jokes filled the room with laughter and spent over an hour answering the many questions we had to ask the man. I found it so interesting to hear the personal opinions of the Justice aside from his judicial opinions, for example, the Westboro Baptist Church case.

I have always had deep interest in foreign affairs and national security. While listening to US Under Secretary of Democracy and Global Affairs Maria Otero explain to us how the international role of the United States promotes democracy and a whole range of other issues from fighting human trafficking to even terrorism. It inspired me to want to join the effort in creating dialog with children all across the world – the long term solution to world peace. The State Department and its speakers were the speakers who I drew most interest in and I hope many after me enjoy the same enriching experience.

An experience many have such desire to participate in was our high honor of meeting the most powerful man in the world, President Barack Obama. Watching him walk down the red carpet, something usually only seen on TV, was incredible! It was as if it wasn't real. Listening to him express his hope for the future and trust in us was very encouraging. Many of us may have agreed or disagreed with the man, but our respect to him and the Office of President was shown true.

My first time to Washington DC was incredible, and it will be very hard to match it in future trips to the nation's capital. The people I met, the things I saw, and the experience I had will forever change my character. I saw so much more than you would see in my home state of Kansas. I actually got to room with someone who politically differed with me, which taught me tolerance and understanding for others. My thanks to the Hearst Foundations is forever true, and the many leaders I met. This experience gives me hope and ever more love for my nation and the people I share it with.