

David Bibeau - ME - 2011

It may sound cliché but, USSYP is a life changing experience, it is a week of constant learning, constant interaction, and constant development. It is a week where each and every moment is packed with a punch, and each and every moment goes beyond your wildest expectations. I cannot think of a single week, or experience in my life where I learned so much so quickly. I had the greatest time of my life, and will never forget a single moment.

I enjoyed being with 103 people who had different opinions but all have a similar common interest. In very few places in the entire world, can you find 103 citizens let alone, high school students, who are able to discuss such matters in an in-depth fashion. The fact is that each of the people I met on this trip were people who I can say I had a genuine excellent time meeting, I feel as though I have forged many friendships, and I know that we will be back together some day working to solve the problems of the world. The most fascinating part however, is the ease of conversing with everyone, one minute we'd talk about healthcare, the next it could be sports, and then we'd have a laugh about a comedian or YouTube video. Some days we would go from a lively debate, to then, in a matter of minutes, be playing something ridiculous like Ultimate Ninja, or then move on to have a giant sing-a-long into later hours of the night.

It was incredibly special to meet each and every one of the military mentors. I truly found one of the most rewarding experiences to just bond with my military mentor Captain Michael LeMay. Captain LeMay, made our group what it was, his attitude, and demeanor helped shape our mentor group into one that was always laughing, always joking, but still always learning and soaking up the wealth of information that each speaker had for us. I was also so proud to have been able to be accompanied by so many decorated officers, each mentor should be commended for their service to the united states and their willingness to aid in the development our youth at USSYP.

My favorite speaker however was Justice Clarence Thomas. I was amused, like many, by his quotes of, "Don't YouTube me bro," and "I liked being black, before being black was cool," but I was most impressed with the time he spent with us. Mr. Ralph Cuomo and I joked, that the hour and a half he spent with us was more time than you get in an oral argument at the Supreme Court. I was enthused by his candid nature and his interesting responses. I was surprised by the fact that he was so candid, open, and friendly because he is so often portrayed by the media as an evil curmudgeon. I loved how he talked about that he enjoyed RVing and staying in Wal-Mart parking lots, it was these small memories that really made the trip.

Another highlight was meeting my senators. When I got on the bus the morning of Tuesday March 8th, I was told, "David, I have a surprise for you today." Now, I'm not big on surprises, but I figured it was nothing, and was just another joke played by Captain LeMay. However, when we arrived at the Kennedy Caucus room for lunch and the presentation by Representative Cory Gardner, I was incredibly excited. It was an absolute thrill to listen to Senator Susan Collins speak, and then to have the opportunity to meet her and talk in the foyer, and pose for pictures. The USSYP Annual reception was excellent. I was fortunate enough to meet many Senators, shake their hands, but it was also inspiring to be in the company of so many of our nation's leaders. Meeting Senator Olympia Snowe was also very exciting, but not so much of a surprise. Meeting her at the USSYP Annual Reception was phenomenal, I enjoyed talking to her about matters concerning national security, posing for pictures, and chatting with her staff. Meeting with both senators made me realize how lucky citizens of Maine are to have two prominent senators who are very active and proponents of the ideals of Civic Republicanism.

The Washington Week truly flew by. I was incredibly sad to see it end, and return home to Maine. The work done by all the Hearst Foundations' organizers and their contacts at all the different offices is astounding. I had the greatest week of my life, and I feel perpetually indebted to the Hearst Foundations for this experience. I cannot say nor do enough to thank everyone who made this week possible. We were able to do so many phenomenal things. We went to the CIA, visited with President Obama, ate lunch in one of the State Department Diplomatic Reception Rooms, met Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, and listened to speeches by Senators Ben Nelson and John Cornyn, the Ambassador from Turkey Namik Tan, Judge Henry, and countless others. USSYP and Washington Week is a phenomenal experience and I feel blessed to have been selected to attend.