

USSYP Delegate Essay

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I remember the day vividly. I was sitting in the kitchen in my grandmother's house. She had just warmed a bowl of her spicy vegetable soup when my mom came through the door. My mom had a weird expression on her face. She looked almost on the verge of tears. She told me that I probably wouldn't be able to participate in the district quiz bowl tournament this year. At first, I was baffled. Why would I not be able to and why had this upset her so much? I wasn't making the connection. My mom then blurted out that I would be attending the 49th annual United States Senate Youth Program, which took place at the same time as the tournament. I was ecstatic. Within a matter of seconds, the three of us were locked in a warm embrace filled with tears. As I joined in a victory jig in my grandmother's kitchen, I couldn't fully imagine how much this trip would mean to me.

When we arrived in D.C., the first day was fairly mellow. It was a blessing for me because I needed to recuperate from the flight. Flying always has me on edge. It was hard for me to truly get a feel of the program at first. All of the delegates, including myself, were reserved and shy. Obviously there was the initial awkwardness when meeting new people. I thought to myself though, how did I make it through the cracks of this program? Even from these brief introductions and small talk, I felt humbled by the accomplishments of my fellow delegates. It was actually intimidating at first to be included in this group of truly talented students. Somehow, in a matter of a few hours though, we all began to let our guard down and bond. It didn't seem like we were strangers, but rather friends that haven't seen each other in a long time.

I must admit it was rather nice to be around youth that actually wanted to discuss policy and national issues instead of the newest episode of Jersey Shore. Something that truly surprised me though was the civility of discussions. I don't think any important issue wasn't extensively debated during the trip, yet no one ever raised their voices. Everyone was able to respect opposing views and actually embrace the differences. This means a lot from a group of students that truly represented the diversity of the United States. All walks of life and thought were part of this magnificent program. I've mentioned all of this because my favorite part of the program ultimately was networking with the leaders of tomorrow. Plus, it's cool to be able to say you know at least two people from every state.

The agenda for the week was packed and well organized. I was simply amazed at how many important figures in our country were willing to speak to us and take questions. Almost every hour of the day was spent listening to someone such as Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas or Secretary of Energy Steven Chu. At many times during the week I had to remind myself that this was reality and not some elaborate dream. Every second was utilized wisely throughout the week. I was certainly exhausted by the end of the week, but it was well worth it.

On top of the activities and people being amazing, the actual accommodations were phenomenal. It is difficult for me to wrap my mind around the idea that the program would cover so much for me and the other delegates. The hotel is simply exquisite, the food was always sublime, and the military mentors were spectacular. I felt safe, comfortable, and spoiled really. It took a few days to adjust from the treatment I received during Washington Week once I returned home.

Overall I still don't understand how I was able to be part of such a great program. That week will be part of my fondest memories. It truly was more than I expected and hoped for when I applied. I am so grateful for everything. It's like I am now part of a constantly expanding family.