

Parker Lawson – KY - 2011

I hesitate to write this piece because while it seems long overdue, its writing is yet another reminder of the closing of one of the greatest experiences of my life. Truly, there is no proper way to express the impression the 2011 United States Senate Youth Program has made on my life. Meeting President Barack Obama is one thing, but being in the company of 103 of the greatest minds our country has to offer is humbling. Many times I found myself asking, "How did I get here?" And yet, I was there, and was incredibly honored to be a part of the United States Senate Youth Program.

Early in the summer of 2010 I found myself researching a political issue on a Senator's website (I remember neither the issue nor the Senator). My attention was quickly taken from my research to an interesting link for the "Senate Youth Program." Upon following the link I found myself mesmerized by what the program had to offer. Little did I know that in several months I would be able to count myself among the impressive alumni of the United States Senate Youth Program.

"If you give it your honest best, you'll have no regrets." Clarence Thomas' remarks were poignant and measured, but this quote was revealing and captivating. Having long been an admirer of Justice Thomas, I was excited to spend time with him as part of the USSYP. I was certainly not expecting to be granted over an hour of his time. Whether one agrees with Justice Thomas' judicial philosophy, I was thankful for the opportunity to learn from him. After all, we were in the presence of living history (not the Constitution, mind you). The second African-American Supreme Court Justice in history shared childhood stories, his ideas about the future, and put his faith in us, students, to lead our country forward. If the week were to have ended after our meeting with him I would have been content.

However, the week was only getting started. The more we immersed ourselves in Washington, the more we found ourselves captivated by it. Too soon was the week over and we were recollecting on what had been. Personally, having never been to Washington, D.C. I was taken aback by the diversity of our nation's capital. The beauty, history, and importance of Washington, D.C. cannot be understated.

My thanks to Captain Michael LeMay for being an incredible Military Mentor. I not only appreciate your service to our country, but your friendship. All of the Military Mentors were wonderful, each bringing a unique personality to the program. The staff of the United States Senate Youth Program deserves the highest of praises. The tireless work throughout the year ensures a magnificent Washington Week, one that I will never forget. Finally, to the other 103 delegates I offer my congratulations. You have inspired me to achieve great things. And a life lived with inspiration is a life that will be well spent, no matter the path it takes.