

Kevin Saucedo-Broach - MD - 2011

When I was informed that I had gotten into the program, I couldn't believe it. I stumbled out of my guidance counselor's office, grinning like a maniac, and grabbed the first friend I could see.

"I got in!" I screamed. The friend looked at me in shock, but before I could explain more in-depth, I ran to the next friend and screamed; then the next friend; and the next. Eventually, I ran into a teacher's room and pranced around until someone calmed me down enough to explain what was going on.

And that's how it went for the next few months. I was in a state of shock, even denial. My nightmare was that it was all a mistake; that the chance of a lifetime would be taken from me. I guarded my information packet jealously, like a miser and his gold. It meant the world to me and as the weeks rolled by, my anticipation shot through the roof.

On that fateful day, my father drove me to the hotel at 11:00 in the morning. Being a Maryland delegate, I didn't get the fancy plane-ride, but I didn't mind. At least I could bring more than one suitcase. We drove up to the Mayflower and, I swear, I fell in love. As much of a palace as I had ever been in, the dimly-lit lobby and the opulent corridor faced me like the open arms of a long-lost parent. I was home.

And an amazing home it was. For a week, I lived amongst some of the most amazing people I had ever met. The speakers were great, don't get me wrong. I loved Brian Lamb (I watch C-SPAN much more now); I got to speak in Spanish to Maria Otero, whose speech on international cooperation was very inspiring; and the President. Dear God, I got to meet the President of the United States. Even now, that seems almost a dream.

But truly, the greatest impact upon me was the other delegates. Meeting so many Americans from across the country with so many viewpoints and opinions was absolutely the best experience of my life. I got to sit at dinner and talk to people from every state about everything from politics to religion and not a single one of them gave me a blank stare (as most of the kids at school would) or looked down at me (as would someone with many more years and much more experience). I sat among peers; people who thought like me, liked the things I did, and dreamed of a better future, as I do.

My roommate, the Blaze of the Senate himself, Chase Blasi from Kansas, wasn't an Obama-lover. I was. I still am. But, there was never an issue of discontent between us. Sure, we disagreed at times. But there was so much we did agree upon and even if there was the odd topic or two, we were still teenagers and we were still looking to have fun. And that's the beauty of it—no matter where everyone was from, no matter what their beliefs were, we all wanted to enjoy this week and have a blast. And so we did.

That's part of what made the week so amazing—that everyone would put aside their differences to get together and have fun. Even now, the amount of love we have for each other and for the group as a whole is through-the-roof. We became a family that week. We laughed together. We debated together. We argued together. We danced together. We ninja'd together (an insider). And by God if we didn't love each other when it was all over.

The final day was one of such torment for me, that it was then that I fully realized how much I had grown to love everyone. As a Maryland delegate, I drove home. But most everyone else took early-morning flights. And I made the decision (one I would make again and again if I could) to stay up the entire night, to wish each and every person a goodbye.

I hugged dozens of people that morning. And with each person that left, a piece of my heart left with them, carried by air to each and every state in the Union (and a couple of military bases overseas). I didn't cry, but I felt a deep sense of loss, as if I knew I wouldn't see many of these

friends—the people I had grown to love—again. These friends had been unlike any I had ever had before. My mind had been stimulated in ways I had never thought possible. A group of teenagers—juniors and seniors, religious and nonreligious, Democrat and Republican and everything in between—had become a family.

And if that can happen with 104 kids, then I firmly believe it bodes well for our country and for the future. We're the young adults who'll be affecting the changing tides of tomorrow. We're the ones who'll be in Congress and in the Courts. And I know in my heart of hearts that one day, one of us will be in the Oval Office, giving great honor to the program and all who have experienced it. With each one of these successes, the United States Senate Youth Program changes the country and the world, just a little at a time. The lessons learned, the friendships forged, and the lives changed will have consequences for the future, and the implications of what was accomplished that week in the Grand Ballroom of the Mayflower Hotel, in the Kennedy Caucus Room, and in the East Room of the White House will reverberate throughout the decades as each one of us succeeds in our endeavors, with no small part due to the amazing experience of the United States Senate Youth Program.