

Scotie Conner - OK - 2011

The delegates, military mentors, Hearst Foundations staff, volunteers and photographers made Washington Week as amazing as it was. Judge Henry, President Obama, Justice Thomas, Secretary Chu, Director Panetta and Secretary Duncan and the rest of our amazing speakers all provided a piece in the puzzle of what exactly it meant to be a public servant. However, the discussions between my fellow delegates and me about policy, philosophy, what was for dinner-those were the moments when I, and the rest of the delegates, grew as individuals. We challenged, supported and defended each other, but we all came to realize that in the halls of the Mayflower Hotel, life long friendships were forged.

On another note, all of our speakers shared a common message-a call for help, and a call for action to address and solve the challenges that America faces today. My fellow delegates, do not forget what I said in my farewell speech to USSYP. According to generational cycle theory, our generation is set to be the next "hero" generation. The last hero generation is the group we affectionately call "the Greatest Generation." These are the men and women who grew up in the austerity of the Great Depression, who fought the Japanese at Okinawa and stormed the beaches of Normandy. This is the generation that launched an economic and cultural boom the likes of which had never been seen before in the world. Simply put, they made America great.

Today we face similarly gigantic challenges-climate change, a sluggish economy, an unsustainable national debt, and now three wars. However, like other hero generations before us, we have the opportunity to craft smart solutions to the great problems of our day. We can build up our institutions, reinvigorate our national soul and strengthen this nation.

The relationships we have formed have enriched ourselves and our peers in ways we cannot even imagine at this point. This program is a wonderful opportunity in all of our lives. Let's take advantage of it! When you go back to your home states, harness your creativity and intellect. Our age should not deter our endeavors. Do not forget that the Egyptians, who protested in Tahrir Square and brought down a 30 year old autocratic regime, were only a few years older than us. My fellow delegates, lead and inspire those around you towards solving the great challenges of our day.

Be the change you want to see in the world, and remember like CIA Director Leon Panetta said, we cannot take America's greatness for granted, it is worth fighting for, and we must fight every day to preserve the characteristics that make us exceptional.

Let's embark on the eternal journey towards forming a more perfect Union. It is a call for action that resonated with the Founding Fathers over 200 years ago, and one that still rings proudly across our nation today.