

Will McPherson - TN - 2011

A single pocket-sized notebook is one of the most important items that I have. It is quaint, tan, and simply pages bound together by a metal spiral. It is special because of the words printed on the front cover: United States Senate Youth Program. But its aesthetic distinction does not make it sentimental. It is what is documented on these pages that make it incredibly special—where I was, whom I was listening to, and whom I was with during these moments. I am confident to say that every single delegate would agree that Washington Week was the best week of our lives, spent with the greatest friends. This short week was completely overwhelming with all of the speakers who have careers that I envy, and with the fellow students who will all have a permanent impact on my life.

As I caught up on my daily internet news browsing in the days before I left for Washington D.C., I read articles about people we were going to soon be in the same room with. The guest list I received really did include these powerful men and women. I am fascinated with the Supreme Court, which naturally made Justice Clarence Thomas my favorite speaker of the week. Being addressed by a person who has the position and esteem that I dream of was completely surreal. While his remarks to us were phenomenal, it was not the mere fact that he was a Supreme Court Justice that set him apart. It was that he was simply Clarence Thomas. He presented to us all how important humility is. His attitude was uplifting, and he was, frankly, hysterical. “I was black before it was cool,” was a quote from Justice Thomas that was repeated throughout the week. The unplanned, lengthy session with Justice Thomas illuminated how the people in Washington are all real people with personality, compassion, and passion.

160 hours was all it took to form some of the strongest friends that I have. While there was some prior awkward Facebook communication, I went to Washington with 103 other political dorks from across the country. The brevity of the experience seems like it would not be conducive for tight relationships, but USSYP formed a community unlike any. I honestly think that I have not laughed as hard as I did during that week. Every single person was not only brilliant, but also amiable. Traveling around Washington, and listening to some of the most powerful people in the world was extraordinary, but spending time with the other delegates and military mentors was the most indelible experience. Singing (or screaming) around the piano, savoring our last moments together is a night that I will never forget. There will be future opportunities to meet influential figures in society, but having that group of friends from across the nation is truly unparalleled.

This trip had many first experiences. March 5th was the first time I had ever flown. Flying was not anything monumental, but where I was flying to was. The plane descended from the clouds and we curved around the Potomac. Pure grandeur unfolded. The view that began Washington Week was the beginning of the most formative experience of my life. I will fly to Washington D.C always reminded of my first flight. And after this week, I know I'll be back; I know that D.C. is where I want to be.