

Reflections on the United States Senate Youth Program

The experience at the United States Senate Youth Program that spoke to me most deeply was entering the chamber of the Supreme Court of the United States and speaking with Chief Justice John G. Roberts. Entering a chamber that few will have the privilege of even seeing in their lives, and thinking of all the historic, life-changing decisions that have been made in that chamber struck me in a raw and emotional way. I gazed around in wonderment from the moment I entered the room to the moment I left, trying to make the most of what little time I had in the chamber. While inside, I had the opportunity to ask a question of the Chief Justice. I spent much time considering what I should ask one of the most deliberative legal minds in the United States, when I finally decided on something; I decided to ask him whether he had ever, considering the consequential nature of many of his court opinions, regretted or changed his view after having voted or written an opinion. His answer struck me as remarkably simple, even he acknowledged it. He simply said “no.” He knew how consequential his work was, and how much thought went into each presentation before the court, and he knew that he could stay up all night, fretting and worrying over each of his decisions. He, however, told me that he preferred to live in the moment, making the best decision that he could at a given time, then moving on. This struck me as an admirable and unexpectedly brief sentiment, even the Chief Justice himself admitting it sounded somewhat cliché, but the more I thought about it, the more reasonable it seemed. We are all only human, despite what offices we might hold, and spending all of our time on this Earth worrying is bound to make us miserable. There was remarkable, humbling wisdom in his words, and I appreciated them deeply.

Overall, this program had a deep impact on me. The program, first and foremost, taught me about the many different ways we can serve our country. From speaking with the Military Mentors, to hearing the words of FEMA Director Brian Kamoie, or Senator Michael Bennet, everyone demonstrated different ways to serve our nation. Each emphasized the nature of their work in maintaining our nation, and each made a convincing case for the job they performed. Although I had already known much about the military and traditional elected political positions and the roles they played in the future of our nation, I had not known much about appointed executive branch roles, especially in disaster relief and other humanitarian roles. Mr. Kamoie’s words stuck with me, as he reminded the delegates that his work was guided by the protection of our nation’s most vulnerable, infants, the elderly, and the infirm. From dealing with the H1N1 Swine Flu pandemic, to the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, his work focused on protecting our nation from large, deadly, and indiscriminating threats. Ultimately, his words reminded me that in public service, we protect what is ultimately most valuable and sacred, the lives and futures of our fellow Americans. This message spoke to me the most, as it reminded me of our mortality, and that nothing can be more fundamental and critical than protecting our fellow people.

More personally, this program has also inspired by continued pursuit of opportunities in government, public policy, and economics. Although my interest in each of these subjects was already strong, having the opportunity to speak with the individuals that work at the highest levels of these fields was inspirational. Senator Michael Bennet espoused many of the economic and public policy views and areas of study that I was most interested in, and sharing this passion with someone who I knew could make a difference was an unforgettable, once-in-a-lifetime experience. This program has served as further motivation to pursue my goals, and try to make a difference. After all, it has shown me what success and passion in public service look like, and I admire it. The United States Senate Youth Program has given me long-term passions and goals, through what is ultimately an inspiring, unforgettable week.