

Jarret Carnes, TX – 2019

Receiving the phone call that I had been selected to represent my state in the 57th annual United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) is a moment I will never forget, filled with such a level of shock and hysteria that I could barely even fathom a response. From sitting in my car at least ten minutes at the post office, re-reading my application over and over again before walking it inside, to anxiously checking my email every day for results, I never imagined that I would be given an opportunity that I had been dreaming of for so long.

When I first arrived at the Mayflower Hotel, it's no secret that my senses were extremely overwhelmed. A room full of people from all across the country, cameras pointed at you during registration, finding a seat for the first time - it was all very intense after flying in just moments before. However, it didn't take long for me to begin feeling comfortable as I met some of the 103 individuals that would sincerely change my life in the following days. My fellow delegates are what made this experience like no other. Any conversation shared during Washington Week was a chance for me to learn something new. I never left a meal without my head buzzing over an issue or perspective I had never heard before, and it was invigorating. I went to bed each night in awe that I was not alone in this world, that these students were just like me, and that is definitely something I will always remember.

I think the magnitude of this program and of our country as a whole did not entirely begin to sink in for me until the day we were leaving Arlington National Cemetery. I have always had a sincere love my country, but when you're staring out over a seemingly endless field of silver gravestones, knowing and understanding that more and more are being added each day, you can't help but feel something more for this country. Seeing the sacrifices that had been made by so many to simply grant my presence in the nation's capital was the moment that my patriotism awoke at a deeper level and sparked my immense respect for our armed forces. This is something that will always serve as a testament to me on the importance of programs such as USSYP that are devoted to empowering our younger generations in realizing their leadership potential.

I entered into our nation's capital with a goal to serve in public office someday, thinking that this was the only way to elevate my passions and ideas to a higher magnitude. Meeting with leaders such as Secretary of the Senate Julie Adams and Parliamentarian Elizabeth MacDonough, however, showed me that careers in public service are vast and extend far beyond just elected positions. Limiting myself to only a run for Congress is simply not the only way for me to be of service to my nation. I see now that I am called to do more for my country. Rather than setting my goal on one specific destination, it should instead be to serve others and give my all in any capacity. I may still choose to seek office someday, but I understand now that the majority of careers in this field begin with unplanned opportunities and I have to be willing, as a leader, to seize every single one that is presented to me rather than just the ones I plan for.

Being a part of the 57th annual United States Senate Youth Program was a life-changing experience for me. The application process, the anticipation, Washington Week, the sleep deprivation - I've never grown more from any other experience and, in the end, I would do it all over again. I am forever grateful to the Hearst Foundations for not only investing in my future and giving me the opportunity to interact with the leaders I read about on a daily basis, but for bringing me 103 new best friends and instilling in me a drive to be a stronger leader each and every day.