

November 25, 2015

Dear St. Pius X Community,

I am writing to share my experience of Close Up to anyone interested in the program. This trip was a once in a lifetime opportunity, an opportunity that I knew I wanted to be a part of. Close Up “informs, inspires, and empowers young people to exercise the rights and accept the responsibilities of citizens in a democracy”. Every day begins early in the morning as your group is guided through the city of Washington, DC. You will have the opportunity to visit monuments, memorials, members of the United States government, the Secret Service, The National Archives, the Washington Monument, Capitol Hill, the White House, and many more areas of interest. Experienced tour guides and workshop leaders will give you the history and impact that the memorial or historic building served, and will guide you to better understanding the foundations of American government.

From Day One, the workshop leaders introduced the main goal of Close Up to us, to increase our own political efficacy. Political efficacy is a sense of empowerment for people to persuade and be knowledgeable on issues that interest them. I thought that this was a wonderful goal, because not only did I increase my political efficacy, but I also was not influenced one way or another. Close Up is set up to allow the student to discover their own political views. Both sides of an issue are addressed, this was very apparent in the Conservative and Liberal debate, and Capitol Hill Day. On Capitol Hill Day, we got to visit the Missouri members of Congress; Jason Smith (R), Claire McCaskill (D), and Roy Blunt (R). The coolest part about Capitol Hill Day was meeting these three people and realizing through Close Up how accessible they are and how they are looking out for the best interests of their constituents, or as Congressman Smith put it; his bosses.

One of the biggest and most important parts of Close Up for me was the people you met along the way. This year students from Alabama, Idaho, Michigan, Missouri, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming were represented. This was great because it allowed us to meet new people with different views and different lifestyles. The roommates next door to us were from Utah and were Mormon. My roommates were from a small farming town in Michigan. The people you meet on Close Up have different views than you do, and this will help you see different views on issues that may not be present in Festus, Missouri.

I would recommend this trip to anyone who wants to better understand and learn about American government and who wants to discover their political efficacy. This trip was one of the best decisions I ever made and I honestly think everyone from St. Pius needs to experience this.

Sincerely,

Brian Mathis