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Ever since I was young people always told me that my generation was full of lethargic teenagers who did nothing but stare at cell phones and watch television. For a long time I started to believe that claim was true but deep down inside I knew that somewhere there had to be a group of teenagers who proved that claim wrong. Little did I know that myself and 90 other individuals was that group that defied such a claim. Going to Vermont I had no idea what to expect and I am under the impression that nothing could have prepared my mind and heart for what was going to take place. The Governors Institute of Current Issues and Youth Activism opened my eyes and really made me question my political views and beliefs. My biggest challenge was acknowledging the fact that I was one of the only republicans in the whole group.

One thing that stood out to me was that despite where one individual may live there are not many differences. I had three roommates, one was from Ireland and two of them were from Vermont. I thought that we would have trouble relating and finding things in common but in reality we had almost everything in common. Although we had some cultural and religious differences it could not compare to our similarities. After two days it felt like we had known each other for years, we could not even go to bed without having one of our girl talk/venting sessions. My roommates were only one great part of the program, the other great part was the workshop issue group I had chosen.

Going into the Politics workshop was one of the greatest decision I ever made because I had finally met people who did not agree with everything I said. I loved the fact that even if we

disagreed on a certain topic we never hesitated to find common ground that we could all live with. Today we see how two parties decide to slander each other rather than learn how to compromise. My politics group quickly realized how ineffective it was when we chose not to work things out. One of our main topics was our current President, Donald Trump. In my issue group we had kids from Spain and it was amazing hearing what they thought about President Trump. Surprisingly they did not hate him but they also did not love him either which was completely understandable. Despite how they felt about him they did not resent the people of America who elected him. Instead they offered points that helped us all realize how Trump got elected in the first place. My teacher Mr. Michael Krasner did a phenomenal job not only teaching us about the American government but also making us aware of all the other forms of government that exist. Along with our issue groups we also got a chance to have smaller groups that discussed topics like the Egyptian Revolution and the Refugee Crisis.

We also had a chance to participate in the Model UN simulation and the mock Congress. My favorite part was representing France in the Model UN. The topic we tackled was climate change and global warming regarding the Paris agreement. It was amazing seeing everyone getting into character but it was also very frustrating hearing the “representatives” of the United States speak. Personally I was not completely educated enough on global warming and climate change but I still could not see what was so wrong about bettering our earth. Playing France made me realize how frustrated other countries must be with America pulling out of the Paris agreement. It also made me want to learn more about that topic so I could educate others about climate change and global warming.

The most memorable part about GICIYA was the friendships I made with kids from all over the world. In only two weeks I had created friendships that I know could never fall apart. My favorite part was speaking to the students who lived in Iraq and learning how to say simple phrases in Arabic. Hearing stories from those individuals made me realize how good we have it. One of my friends Abbas told me how his home was invaded by ISIS and I could not believe all the hardships he had gone through. Despite his hardships he still managed to hold his head high and keep a big smile on his face. I also made three new best friends that I still talk to till this day: Alex from Spain, Fatimah from Baghdad and Chelsea from Florida. These girls mean the world to me and I could never forget them. Despite time differences we always do our best to talk at least once a day. After all we will be reuniting in Spain next summer. We allowed music and dance to unite us all because even though we may have had some language barriers we all spoke dance.

It has been one month since I have participated in The Governor's Institute of Current Issues and Youth Activism. I still cannot talk about the huge impact this program has had on me without tearing up. It changed me completely. My mind, soul and body has awakened with this fiery passion to change not only America but the whole world with the help of my fellow peers. I replay this program over and over again in my head because it does not feel right that it had to end. It changed me as an individual who will soon play a role in Politics. It has helped shape my views and who I am today. It has also confirmed my goals for the future and it gave me a bigger reason to want to be a Senator. I wish every single individual had a chance to participate in this program because no one leaves the same way they entered. I am so blessed, honored, thankful and grateful to have been chosen to be a part of this program. All I have left to say is Thank

You to the Naples Council on World Affairs who allowed me to experience this wonderful program.