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**New Zealand Business and Parliamentary  
Trust Essay Competition**

**What I got out of Youth Parliament 2007**

The phrase I heard the most during my time at Youth Parliament was “we are New Zealand’s future leaders”. The more I heard this phrase, the more I thought about it. The more I thought about it, the more daunting it became. The question I asked myself was “will our generation really be fit to run the country?” I realised that although you cannot learn to govern a country in three days, Youth Parliament was an important opportunity for us to learn about our parliamentary system.

There are certain things you just can’t learn from the TV or internet. Some things need to be witnessed and experienced to be truly understood. It wasn’t until I sat down in my MP’s chair in the chamber, listened to my peers speeches and witnessed a few of them get their share of tongue lashings from the speaker, that I understood at least a small part of what it was to be a politician. The first day in parliament was a 12 hour day, listening to speeches, debating and networking. We thought that was tough, and were glad to put our feet up at the end of the day. On the plane back to my hometown I reflected on this, and realised that the first day we spent in parliament would be considered one of the “easy days” for some of the actual MPs.

I also learned that you can never fully trust anything written about politicians in the media. I had my first taste of negative media coverage when on Tuesday morning I read an article in the Dominion Post, blatantly misquoting some of my new friends. I commented on this to the MP I was representing; he simply laughed and said “they were lucky, you should see some of the things they write about us” I laughed at this too, as I remember countless scathing article and cartoons about politicians. It dawned on me that they were getting flak from the media for simply doing their job.

I feel as though Youth Parliament has given me a concrete set of career goals; I was never sure as to what I wanted to do when I left school. After my experience at youth parliament I know for sure I want to continue to be involved in politics, and will pursue tertiary education in

communication studies and public relations. I value the fact that youth parliament gave me the chance to talk to other youth about their career aspirations. The result was that I realised I wasn't the only person who wasn't sure what they were going to do when they left school. In that sense, Youth Parliament gave me confidence and assurance.

The experience as a whole opened my eyes to the big wide world. Growing up in a small rural community it was so important to meet like minded people, people my age who, like me, have a strong interest and even passion for politics. Since returning from Youth Parliament I have read a speech in my school assembly, which my peers really paid attention to. Other students have since asked me how they apply, and how I found out about it. I think this is really valuable, a sense of genuine interest from younger students of opportunities available to them. This kind of motivation and interest is what our school was previously lacking. I have also been asked to speak at our local Rotarian meeting, where I will talk about my experience and my new goals and aspirations.

Being at Youth Parliament was an experience that had to be lived to be fully understood. I had my eyes forced open to the sometimes deceiving media, and got the chance to talk to like minded youth, which is uncommon in my small community. The experience was even valuable to my peers at home, as when I returned they took a genuine interest in my experiences. I wondered whether my generation would be fit to run the country one day; with initiatives like Youth Parliament, New Zealand's future leaders are certainly off to a good start.