

LUKE CRAVEN

Youth Parliament Essay

Our lives are changed not by events, but how we react to them; this is how I see my time at Youth Parliament. If I had gone with high expectations I may have been disappointed. Instead I went with no expectations, I would go with the flow, enjoy myself; and that's exactly what happened. Youth Parliament turned out to be the best week in my life; in this essay I will detail my time in Wellington and what I have taken from it.

Youth Parliament didn't start until Monday and it was an early start. Up and ready by half past six, filled with food by seven and eagerly awaiting my first twelve hour working day. For me the first few hours flew past, I couldn't wait to get into the select committee. We were assembled into our groups of twelve, madam chair leading the way, and we arrived at our select committee room. We sat in our designated seats and waited for commencement. I was positioned right next to the submitter's chair where I would get a great view of all the action. We had four witnesses who all answered questions well, with only a few being dodged. Our last half hour of select committee comprised of deliberation, all we thought we did was sat around and have a heated debate. However our clerk was able to write a report off our disjointed conversation. I had a new found respect for the Parliamentary staff; they are good at what they do.

One of the main things I learnt from my experience is that select committees are where most of the work gets done. Every law that is passed goes through the select committee; it is the machinery of parliament. I intend to keep up with select committee business and give submissions on issues that I feel strongly about. This is something I would have never done before my time in Wellington. When we were asked as a group of 121 how many of us had submitted in the past only three people raised their hands; youth either don't know about this avenue to get their voices heard or they don't care. Because of this I have gotten permission from my principal to start a "Submissions called for" notice board at school and to have regular speaking slots in assembly. Through this I hope to get more of my peers both interested and involved in the democratic process.

Monday afternoon comprised of question time and the general debate. Question time had been allotted two hours in the schedule, however it passed very quickly only taking half an hour. Many people who gave questions were disappointed at how their questions had been rephrased to suit the ministers and supplementary questions had been written for them. Someone compared it to an intricate dance scene; rehearsed over and over until nothing could go wrong. However this is very much the same for the real MPs; all the answers are prepared and I don't think it would be fair if this were not the case.

Something I noticed after question time is that all the TV cameras left. I was told by David McGee that this is much the case in real life. I learnt a lot about the media from my experience; for example they only report what the majority of the public wants to hear. The majority of the public doesn't care about the nitty-gritty of parliament; they only want to hear when things go wrong. That is why I will now go directly to the source; the Hansard will be my Women's Weekly. I have already started watching the parliamentary webcasts when I get home from school, it is something I thoroughly enjoy doing.

The general debate was fantastic; people were able to talk about the things that mattered to them and others realised that they could interject. I took the opportunity and raised a few frivolous points of order; I was told later by Ann Hartley that it must be something to do with my seat. We had time left over for impromptu speeches at the end and although I didn't participate in this I did enjoy such robust debating.

These were the times at Youth Parliament that I enjoyed the most but it was so much more that could be in here if my limit was not eight hundred words. Youth Parliament for me is summed up by something Martin Luther King once said, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." In other words, get involved in politics because there are so many things that matter and so many ways to get your voice heard.