

Jordan Cozby, AL – 2015

Participating in the United States Senate Youth Program was one of the most amazing experiences of my life. From our immediate arrival and warm welcome by the military mentors through our final day and the heartfelt goodbyes of each delegate to one another; every aspect of the Washington Week 2015 was absolutely remarkable.

During the program and particularly in the weeks following, I have felt deep gratitude for everyone who played a role in making it such a success. Each of the delegates I spoke with was similarly overwhelmed by the blessing of the USSYP experience and thankful that fortune smiled on us to have this opportunity. I believe that each and every one of us is deeply grateful for the resources dedicated to making Washington Week the fantastic time it was.

We are thankful for the care of family, friends, teachers, and mentors who have for years provided guidance and encouragement. The support of our communities doubtlessly has made us the people we are today, helped us through the selection process for U.S. Senate Youth Program, and so much more.

We are thankful for the speakers who as busy world leaders still dedicated time to impart their wisdom unto us.

We are thankful for the Military Mentors who on a daily basis protect our freedom. Their personal commitment to our nation and willingness to provide guidance to us speaks to the principles they embody.

We are thankful for the organizations including NASA, the World Bank, U.S. Department of State, and more who so kindly welcomed us to their respective headquarters share information on the crucial work they do to improve our country and the world.

We are thankful for the Hearst Foundations for its continuing advocacy on behalf of our nation's young leaders and financial support of the U.S. Senate Youth Program.

We are thankful for the U.S. Senate for making youth engagement a priority. The leadership of Co-Chairs Manchin and Isakson, the members of the 2015 Advisory Committee, and each senator who supported the program by attending the Senate reception all gave us a personal connection with the U.S. Senate and its important work.

We are thankful for the staff members who plan and organize this program on an annual basis. The tireless work of these individuals developed and coordinated each detail of the week and ensured its success.

We are thankful for the alumni of the U.S. Senate Youth Program who are engaged in a multitude of ways to better their communities and our nation. The advice they shared at the alumni mentoring day helped many of us as we consider career paths and our futures.

We are thankful for the staff at the Mayflower Hotel and the other venues where our events were held, the security team members, and bus drivers. The kindness and service of these individuals were an important part of each day we spent in Washington.

We are thankful for the photography and work of Jakub Mosur and Erin Lubin who along with the documentary team captured the memories we all shared throughout the week.

We are thankful for our fellow delegates. I believe each of us learned so much from each other and built friendships that will last a lifetime.

The massive effort undertaken by so many people to establish this program speaks to more than just a wonderful opportunity for a few, fortunate students – it tells of the very heart of what the U.S. Senate Youth Program strives to accomplish. Washington Week is built upon the three pillars of Leadership, Education, and Public Service; together these ideals construct a brighter future for our nation. Each person who helped organize Washington Week 2015 has not only contributed to several days of lasting memories, but a more permanent development of friendship and leadership among everyone involved. These links of companionship and understanding are critical for our generation in solving the substantial issues of partisan brinksmanship and political polarization.

The delegates I'm now honored to call my friends are leading non-profits, student governments, political organizations, and much more. In the rush of a single week we made friendships that are more enduring than we can now realize. The story of our time with USSYP has not concluded – it is in the future and the years will seem to fly by that our true opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others and each other will become clear.