

Kylon Harris, GA - 2015

Since researching before Washington Week, I have anticipated writing this essay. I knew that it would be hard to capture a lifetime of experiences, excitement, and energy in just one essay. I will try my best to describe to you what you may know as “Washington Week,” but what all USSYP alumni know as “the week that changed our lives.” I will give you insight on how I found out about, the application process for, the preparation for, and the descalation from Washington Week, and also share a few of my fondest memories.

My father, while visiting my school’s counselor’s office one afternoon, stumbled upon the United States Senate Youth Program application. With excitement, he and my mother presented it to me, and encouraged me to apply. With it being just a few days before the deadline, and with the hustle and bustle that comes with senior year, I quickly dismissed the application after a quick glance. Then, on the very night that it was due, I got a question from my parents that I knew was coming, but hoped it didn’t. “Did you finish the USSYP application?” Knowing that my chances of attending the last football game of the season were quickly diminishing, I grumpily walked into my parents’ room, and began writing. The rest, as they say, is history. I have thanked my parents a thousand times since returning from Washington Week for encouraging me when I didn’t encourage myself.

Each state has its own selection process. For the state of Georgia, after submitting the application, applicants were administered a test that was nearly two hours long. Upon satisfactory scoring on the test, delegates and alternates were chosen after an interview.

I honestly thought that, in a best case scenario, I would be chosen as an alternate. Therefore, you can imagine my surprise and enthusiasm when I received an email saying that I had been selected as one of two delegates from the state to attend the program. I started packing immediately, and began to prepare for what many delegates, including myself, initially believe the trip is centered on — meeting the president of the United States. Now, don’t get me wrong. Meeting the leader of the free world was an absolutely breath-taking experience, but as you continue reading, you will find, just as I did, that there were so many equally exciting occurrences.

After being greeted at the airport by some of our nation’s finest, who we came to know as Military Mentors, we were swept into coaches to be transported as official guests of the U.S. Senate to the Mayflower Hotel. There we were met by program alumni who answered questions about our perspective educational majors and career fields. Additionally, they set our racing hearts at ease by giving us just enough insight on the program to make us want to go straight to bed in order to get to tomorrow quicker.

Throughout the week, we met many influential people ranging from our home state senators to cabinet secretaries to an associate Supreme Court justice and of course, the president. Many of us left the program with inspirational quotes such as “Focus not on who you want to be, but on what you want to do to make a change,” by President Obama or “You don’t have to be in office to make a difference. Start small and let your light ignite,” by Judge Robert Henry. USSYP also provided me with the opportunity to be on national television. After meeting Mr. Brian Lamb, the founder of C-Span, we filmed a Q & A session with us, the 53rd delegation of the United States Senate Youth Program.

As I prepare to close my essay, I would be remiss if I did not express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Hearst Foundations and their amazing staff who work year round to make Washington Week possible. I will never be able to say “thank you” enough. So, if you are considering applying for the United States Senate Youth Program, prepare to experience government in a way that you’d never get from your AP Government class, prepare to meet people who may become closer to you than your very best friend, and finally, prepare to absorb advice and lessons that will equip you with the motivation and determination you need to be an agent of change!