

People say that college is the best four years of your life. I have yet to experience college, but I can confidently say that the best *week* of my life was spent at the United States Senate Youth Program. I am afraid that words will not be able to adequately describe my experience during Washington Week. To decry the level of nostalgia I felt in the weeks after my time with my fellow delegates is practically impossible. It is rare to be able to make such lasting connections and memories in just a few short days, especially when the people with whom you have shared those memories have the same ambitions, drive, and aspirations you do. Meeting esteemed public officials, visiting renowned historical and diplomatic monuments, and developing close relationships with like-minded teens and selfless military personnel are just a few highlights to describe my week in Washington. When paired with the enormous generosity of the Hearst Foundations and USSYP staff, there is no doubt that this program is a once in a lifetime experience.

When I arrived at the airport, my inner stalker revealed itself in full throttle. The Facebook group had done such a ridiculously great job of chalking up my anxiousness of meeting the other delegates that I almost sprinted to the first group of teens I saw that donned blue USSYP tags on their luggage. As we all boarded the coaches to travel to the hotel - and they are *coaches*, not buses - I could sense the contentment among us. The majority of us were outgoing, and we all immediately mingled, getting to know each other's names, states, and eventually party identification. What did you expect? We were all teens with a passion for politics, government, and public service. Throughout the week, our conversations would become more erudite, and sometimes intense, but the amenities of our overly enthusiastic intercourse and occasional heated debates were aspects of our trip that we would all come to cherish.

Arriving at the grandiose Mayflower Hotel, getting acquainted in our five star rooms, and enjoying delectable meals made the first night in Washington seem like it couldn't get any better. However, meeting our Military Mentors proved me wrong. I had a preexisting notion about military personnel that depicted them as stern individuals who did not eat or drink and wore their uniform everywhere, including bed. Getting to know my Military Mentor and the others not only revealed to me that they were some of the most hilarious, genuine people I had ever met, but also established within me a confirmation for my passion for public service. Speaking to the Military Mentors about their campaigns and experiences was an absolute keepsake. I was so entranced with their lives that I often looked at my Military Mentor in awe because she was such a powerful, inspirational woman. Shoutout to Lieutenant Colonel Batungbacal, the leader of the Fab 8 docent!

Throughout the week, our meetings with public officials and diplomats truly peaked my interest to pursue a career on Capitol Hill. I always knew I wanted to work in public health and service, but after Washington Week, I was convinced that working for the Department of Health was my calling. Visions of working in the Senate and later serving as the secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services crossed my mind all week. Meeting individuals such as Senator Manchin and World Bank President Dr. Jim Yong Kim were two of many meetings that stuck with me. I will never forget the words of Senator Manchin when he said, "leave a little meat on the bone for the next dog." USSYP allowed me to do just that. I had rekindled my zeal for youth activism. I would return home as an ebullient high school girl with stories that no one could identify with, but were meaningful nonetheless. I would spend the next three weeks in school constantly debating international issues with my peers, encouraging them to think deeper, further, and more intuitively than they ever had before. I wanted to leave a little meat on the bone for the next dog so that he or she could be as inspired as I was at USSYP. I wanted to influence my peers to think beyond their mundane day to day troubles and start thinking about the future. I wanted to leave a lasting impact on my friends' minds so that they could take a bite of the bone I had victoriously received in D.C.

Washington Week relayed the importance of public service to all who attended, but for me, it had a deep-rooted impact. It showed me that my generation will be an agent of revolution in this nation. My generation is not defined by the stereotypes that prophecy its failure. My generation is a generation of teens who spend countless nights buried in books, hours listening to the news, and numerous after school weekdays at community charities paying it forward. I will never forget President Obama's wisdom when he said, "don't worry about who you want to be, but worry about what you want to do." We are a generation of doers, motivators, and achievers. Words cannot express how thankful I am for the Hearst Foundations for this opportunity. On behalf of the delegates of the United States Senate Youth Program 2015, we promise to do, to instigate, and to succeed, not for ourselves, but for the generations to come.