

Genna (Yihang) Liu, WV - 2015

Washington Week 2015 is one in the books — literally. Throughout the week, we took notes in our notebooks that were modeled after the ones used by journalists. The role of journalists is to bring information to the public, and that is symbolic of what we as delegates should do in order to maximize the Senate Youth Program's effects. Here are a few inspirations I have received throughout my experience.

We are the change. This was one point constantly reiterated throughout the week. We cannot sit on the sidelines: only through assuming an active role and accepting attitude can we fix the broken and improve the world. As Senator Susan Collins said, we need to be steadfast in our values, but lenient on the details. Her colleague, Senator Cory Gardner used a column as an example: while the location of the structure cannot be compromised, its colors can. West Virginia's very own Senator Joe Manchin also elaborated on the spirit of compromise. We are a nation of many different opinions and ideas, and tolerance is the key to guaranteeing future success.

In light of recent events, how can we ensure that every citizen is protected during a time of division? Judge Robert Henry informed us that although we may not love each other, "we can learn to love the law and make it fair for all." Assistant attorney general for civil rights, Vanita Gupta, shined a light on the deep rift experienced by different groups in the country. Discrimination based on differences is poisonous to the welfare of the nation. We, as one drop of water stand divided, but we are a whole ocean united together.

This concept also applies to the fantastic students I met during Washington Week. The delegates are a group of unforgettable individuals of quintessential passion. Although each of us differed in background, interest, and even accents, we were united by one commonality — the love for and devotion to our country. The discussions here were everything but apathetic; with topics ranging from sociology to student debt and Senate elections, they are some of the most inspirational young adults I have ever met. I am sure in the coming years I will be reading about them in the news.

For me, seeing the Senate Secretary Julie Adams and Parliamentarian Elizabeth McDonough asserted to me the importance of non-elected officials in the government. Behind the scenes and away from the public eye, they painstakingly work to ensure that the functioning of the government. They affirmed my desire of serving the people and introduced the idea of pursuing public service. Public service is not "self service," Senator Manchin commented, and as servants of the people, we must do everything in our ability to fight for them.

The staff contains so many exceptional individuals. From the Military Mentors to the possessor of the golden voice, Mr. Cox, from the mysterious Ms. DeSmet to director Ms. Guilford, many people have contributed to the success of the program through sacrificing countless hours and work. Also, thank you to the Hearst Foundations for its generous support behind this amazing program.

Although the 53rd annual USSYP is over, the impact we felt and lessons we learned continue to live on.