

Jared Long, KS – 2016

The 2016 United States Senate Youth Program Washington Week is something that I will never forget. I could write for hours reminiscing on the experience which will surely impact every choice I make relating to the path my life will take. I could write about the many incredible speakers whose inspiring words I will remember until the end of my life. I could write about the fascinating, in-depth tours of NASA facilities and various museums. I could write about dining in the presence of the Charters of Freedom or appearing on C-SPAN (albeit simply in the background), things I am still amazed I was able to do. I could even write about the luxurious Mayflower Hotel or delicious food served. There are so many aspects of the United States Senate Youth Program, and my words could never do all of them justice. Therefore, I want to write about spending the week with 103 incredible high school students.

I never expected the most memorable part of my experience at Washington Week would be the time spent hanging out with 103 of the most intelligent, kind, hardworking, and fascinating people I've ever met. When I originally found out about the program, it was the opportunity to hear from so many distinguished people which made me want to apply. I never expected to be one of two representatives from my beloved state at the United States Senate Youth Program. When I was, I was ecstatic. I smiled from ear to ear and called everyone who knew I had applied. I shared the news via social media and was quickly contacted by delegates looking for each other through social media. I was invited to join a group message on the app GroupMe. It was through that simple group message that I got to know the wonderful people I would be spending Washington Week with. The innumerable conversations we had, and still have, both fascinating and funny, are conversations I will never forget.

When I arrived at The Mayflower Hotel, I was awestruck by the beauty. That awe was only at the front of my mind for a short time as I soon realized that I was only a few footsteps away from meeting the people who I had eagerly awaited three months to meet. It was agonizing as my arrival group stood outside the doors of the Mayflower Hotel Grand Ballroom listening to rules knowing that there were a slew of delegates just beyond the doors. As the doors were opened for us, I bolted into the room where I would spend the rest of the day mingling with people who I already thought were my best friends, little knowing how much closer we would become over the next week. The nights spent on the mezzanine level of The Mayflower Hotel laughing with fellow delegates are nights I will never forget. The moments spent mingling with fellow delegates in long security lines are moments I will never forget. The bus rides spent debating with my best friends are bus rides I will never forget. Each of my 103 fellow delegates made a very unique and specific impact on me. I will never be able to express how truly grateful I am to each and every one of my fellow delegates for making an experience which changed my life so memorable.

After the week had flown by and it was the morning to leave, I dreaded hearing my departure group called. I spent my last few minutes in The Mayflower Hotel hugging anyone and everyone. I was incredibly saddened to say goodbye to people who I had become so close to in just one short week. However, I was often reminded that my "goodbyes" were really "see you later's" for there is nothing that could keep us from seeing each other again in the future.

I am incredibly indebted to The Hearst Foundations, the incredible USSYP staff, and the other 103 delegates. Washington Week changed my life. I will never forget the amazing experience. It will be with me for the rest of my life, and that is something I am eternally grateful for.