

Alexis Vannett, ND – 2016

Wow, where do I begin! I think I have been sitting here for an hour trying to figure how to sum up in just one essay an experience that completely changed my life for the better. I thought I would break it down into a series of letters addressed to certain groups of people.

I will try my best to do it justice. No pressure or anything...

Dear Hearst Foundations,

There are no words I can tell you all that could ever express the amount of gratitude I have – I will forever be indebted to you. Washington Week was an incredible experience. I will always look back on March 5<sup>th</sup> – March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016 as one of the best weeks of my life. I am so blessed to have been a part of this program. You all are changing the lives of young people, inspiring us to dream big and to go after those dreams head first. Your generosity will never be forgotten by any of us, and I know I speak for all 104 delegates when I say this: Thank you for changing our lives for the better.

Dear Political Leaders, Elected Officials, and Other Speakers,

Thank you all so very much for taking time to speak with us during our Washington Week. It is people like you who we all look up to and aspire to be one day. I will always remember that I do belong. To be mindful of my guardian angels. To remember that public service is a noble calling. That there is so much more to leadership and being a leader than just a title. To take risks in life. That America is an exceptional country. To find and never let go of good mentors. To question. To fight against lower standards every day. That one person really can make a world of difference. And, if I ever get the chance, to take a trip up to space and see the phenomenal view recommended by THE INCREDIBLE Dr. Piers Sellers.

You all inspire our generation. We are so grateful to have people like you to look up to.

Dear Portraits of Nancy and Ronald Reagan,

I CANT BELIEVE I GOT TO ACTUALLY SEE YOUR PORTRAITS IN REAL LIFE AND STAND IN THE PLACES THAT BOTH OF YOU HAVE BEFORE WHEN LOOKING AT THEM ON THE WHITE HOUSE WALL I AM YOUR BIGGEST FAN.

My middle name is Reagan – named after my favorite POTUS Ronald Reagan. These portraits were what I was looking forward to seeing all week! That was the coolest experience.

Dear Military Mentors,

I want to start off by saying thank you to each of you for fighting fearlessly and courageously for the United States of America. You keep us safe and protect us from harm. You are the reason we live in the land of the free.

I learned so much from your stories and your experiences. You are my heroes, and I am forever grateful to you for all you do for our great nation.

Thank you again from the bottom of my heart.

Dear Hotel Staff and Caterers,

Thank you all so very much! The food was the best I have ever eaten (please don't tell my mom... or my grandma...). The hotel is so beautiful, and I felt very safe and comfortable there. I hope to visit D.C. again, and if and when I do, the Mayflower is the place I will be staying!

Thank you all again! I had the greatest time.

Dear Best Friends,

My heart is breaking as I write this because I still remember how hard it was saying goodbye to all of you. There is no doubt in my mind that I was surrounded by a group of people destined to change the world. I am beyond blessed to have met you all, and I am thankful that we got to share the week of a lifetime together. Since getting back to North Dakota, I realize that I am full of hope for our country's future. I am full of hope because I was a part of encouraging and stimulating discussion about relevant issues that should be talked about. I am full of hope because we didn't let our political views blind us or hinder us from listening to each other. I am full of hope because we all realize that each of us just wants to help the people of this country become the best they can be. I am full of hope because each of you are so passionate about our country, and each of you know exactly what it means to be an American. I am full of hope because you are all full of hope.

Thank you Deja, Steven, Lucas, Kiera, Lydia, Ryley, Anna, Hannah, Emily, Zena, DeAnna, Se Young, Durga, Alexandra, Laura, Charlie, Brian, Max, Adam, Kyelee, Nii, Meredith, Justin, Perry, Zach, Mark, Ashlynn, Brooke, Alex, T.J., Beau, Jared, Andrew, Caitlin, Rimsha, Nathan, Cade, Lexie, Julia, Matthew, Alex, Hari, Jake, Caroline, Jacob, Grace, Dasom, Joseph, Jackson, Meghana, Helene, Mollie, Arthur, Sean, Paige, Jacob, Dody, Mahishan, Abigail, Andre, David, Ben, Liana, Walter, Aanand, Abigail, Sara, Lilly, Richard, Matthew, Nate, Avery, Jessica, Roshni, Luke, Keith, Zack, Quadri, Michael, Caroline, Manaal, Justin, Claire, Cesia, Corina, Ellie, Carson, Ethan, Marisa, Will, Monica, Lucy, Hashwinder, Arka, Adrien, Alesha, Elyssa, Madeline, Miranda, Kate, Kiley, Corbin, and Josh for all of the incredible memories. I hope we cross paths again! You are all amazing people, and I cannot wait to see how each of you changes the world for the better. You certainly have changed my life for the better.

Your forever friend,

Ali

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