

Benjamin Sorkin, NY – 2016

To say that no time was wasted during our experience at Washington Week would be an understatement. From the early morning arrival to our down to the minute schedule of the week to the late nights squeezing out as much conversation with other delegates as possible, I can confidently say I have never spent a week of my life doing as much as I did during the week I had the honor of spending in Washington, D.C. with the 54<sup>th</sup> annual Senate Youth Program. More notably, I have never had as many inside jokes, insightful conversations, once-in-a-lifetime encounters, and much needed naps as I did during Washington Week.

The Class of 2016's experience began long before the fateful week in March; in fact, it began before selections had even come out, when a bunch of applicants got connected on Twitter. As soon as states started releasing their selections, we had a GroupMe going which eventually managed to contain all 104 delegates, a feat that no other year had been able to accomplish. Through the wonders of the internet and modern technology, many of us had already become friends before we got to Washington D.C, and we are all still in contact today, weeks and hopefully months afterwards in that very group chat. The GroupMe represents the most meaningful part of Washington Week: the people.

Each and every individual that I met during Washington Week made an impact on me that I think about on a daily basis. Sometimes, I see something that reminds me of a joke they made or a question they asked, and I shoot them a text about it. Other times, when I'm on a road trip and see a sign for their town or state, I'm always sure to send them a photo of it. I have never been in an environment with such amazing, talented, accomplished, and intelligent people and I urge all future USSYPers to truly cherish the time they have among their fellow delegates. I hesitated wanting to debate political ideologies with some other delegates because of the nature of debates on similar issues I've had back home, but in fact some of my fondest memories of the week include heated discourse on every topic imaginable.

As much as I enjoyed my interactions with my peers, the real substance of the week occurred at the various speaking events we attended. No matter how much I wish it weren't the case, there will likely never be a week again in my life where I get to hear addresses from the president of the United States, a sitting Supreme Court justice, a NASA astronaut, multiple senators, and countless other government officials all within the span of seven days. Some notable quotes from these addresses still find their way into my life and in my conversations on a weekly basis. "Don't focus on who you want to be, focus on what you want to do", "When drinking the water, remember who dug the well", "You don't need to act like you belong, because you do belong", "Be mindful of your guardian angels", and "Read before you tweet" are all truisms that I heard during Washington Week that have an impact in my everyday life and are words I'll carry with me for the rest of my life.

My favorite speaker of the week was without a doubt *Washington Post* journalist, Jonathan Capehart. I might be biased in choosing him, as he is the speaker with the largest Twitter presence and has plenty of snark to go around in his replies, but I also enjoyed him the most because he was by far the most surprising speaker. While I don't have an interest or background in journalism, Mr. Capehart offered the most interesting perspective as one of the speakers who was more detached from or resided "outside" of the direct political realm. He has a captivating presence about him, and despite speaking as our breakfast presenter early in the morning, I couldn't stop listening intently to every word he had to say about his work and his opinions on the current political situation.

Along with Mr. Capehart, I was amazed at how close I got with various military mentors during the week and how much I appreciated having them around. They served as more than just points of information; they truly created a family within our military mentor groups. The military mentors connected with the delegates in a way I couldn't have even imagined, even despite the difference in age and life experience between them and the delegates. Captain Mike McCarthy provided support, humor, and a rare smile that made my experience at Washington Week exponentially better than it would have been without having him there. These heavily accomplished, well decorated, yet still compassionate and caring leaders of our nation's military give me confidence and reassurance in the strength and character of our military and our nation as a whole.

I still cannot believe that I had the honor of having been chosen as the male commencement speaker for the 54<sup>th</sup> annual U.S. Senate Youth Program. I have addressed groups of people five times the size of the audience of my USSYP commencement, but none of those groups made me feel as honored and privileged to be providing my perspective than the group of delegates I addressed on the closing night of Washington Week. I hope my remarks had an impact on the leaders of tomorrow that I was able to address, and I hope they were able to take something from what I said that they can apply in their lives and their futures.

To the next class of Washington Week delegates, cherish the food during Washington Week — you'll grumble about any meal that doesn't have three courses in it for a long time once you leave. Cherish the bus rides; you're driving past buildings and monuments of immense importance to our country. Cherish the buddy rule; you'll feel weird about going anywhere alone for a while. Cherish the military mentors; they are truly some of the best our armed forces have to offer. Cherish the accommodations at the Mayflower; I know I won't be staying anywhere that nice anytime in the near future. Cherish the speakers; even if the coffee at breakfast isn't doing its job, you may never get the chance to hear some of them speak in person again. And lastly, cherish the friendships you'll foster during your own Washington Week, you'll carry them with you for a lifetime.