

Hashwinder Singh, WA – 2016

Very rarely does an event occur which indelibly leaves an impact upon a person in which their entire life is transformed and the core of who they are is altered for the better. Even more rarely do these events occur in one's adolescent years. And yet, all it took was seven days in D.C. and my identity as a student, an aspiring politician, and foremost, as an American were positively influenced. For me, the program's most positive impact was reaffirming my desire to actively pursue a career in politics. Being surrounded by some of the nation's most intelligent and passionate students comprised an environment in which everyone wanted to give back to the country that molded them. To be a part of such a great community was a reminder that there are people within my generation who do have the yearning to make the world a better place, a stark contrast to the sometimes bleak and grim reality our generation is faced with. Yet, just as important as the students were in creating that environment, I would be remiss to not incorporate the uniqueness that the military mentors brought to Washington Week. The interactions I had with each military mentor (and especially the great Captain Mike McCarthy) gave me a new-found outlook on the military in general and for that, I am incredibly grateful and humbled by their presence during the program.

While the highlight of the week from a speaker standpoint was President Barack Obama, that is not to discredit the other speakers at all. From a pure informative standpoint, Jonathan Capehart was another major highlight within my week. Being one of the few not tied down to a platform, Mr. Capehart was able to give his honest assessment of our society and culture and because of that, I thoroughly enjoyed his presentation. In addition, the individual from the Arlington National Cemetery had a presentation that was incredibly impactful and his duty as a guard for the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier was enlightening. Finally, Senator Cory Gardner's presentation was also enjoyable due to his lighthearted personality and simply due to his perspective as a member of Congress. All in all, every single speaker that was brought in added a different perspective on current issues that face our country today and that accumulation of those perspectives have further helped solidify my own opinions, desires and steps forward in the career of politics.

In addition to the speakers, there were certain events that were unparalleled in terms of enjoyment. Primarily, being able to tour the Newseum was a highlight within my week. The diversity of exhibits there were, to say the least, interesting. In addition, the time spent at the Kennedy Center was different than the experiences that were had at other events during the week; it was much more relaxed and more geared for our entertainment rather than to attain information and perspective which was a nice change of pace within the week.

All in all, my time spent in Washington, D.C. through the USSYP contained moments which I will remember for the rest of my life. The people I met on a personal level (and the lifelong connections that came as a result), listening to different speakers and seeing D.C. from a different perspective has transformed my thoughts as a U.S. citizen and I have changed for the better. I am excited to see where my future takes me in the field of politics and law and I know that I'll be able to look back on Washington Week as a catalyst for my career.