

Allison Reinhardt, MT – 2017

From the Big Sky to the Big City – I must admit the morning I was scheduled to fly out of Montana I told my parents that maybe I should consider missing my flight. I was a bit frightened to meet the top 103 other students from across the nation! My merits seemed small in comparison to the other delegates. It was this fear that occupied my mind most of the day. But this fear quickly dissipated. The confidence that my other delegates and some of the speakers instilled in me allowed me to know that I am a delegate of the United States Senate Youth because I am a leader with a passion for education and a desire to serve. The 103 other delegates quickly made me believe that we can change the world.

It was not the delegates' political perspectives and profound resumes that amazed me the most it was how we all had differing opinions and yet we could all have a civilized discussion. That was something that I had never experienced in my school, classroom, and even family reunions. The level of respect and kindness that each delegate possessed was incredible. I kept thinking that if we could run the country maybe we could really change things.

Often times I hear from adults that I am the leader of tomorrow. But I am the leader of today and Washington Week helped me realize that. To say that I want to change the world may seem a bit idealistic or even unrealistic but to say that I want to better my world is completely doable. After hearing from Surgeon General Dr. Murthy I know what I can do to better the world. He encouraged us to try living on a food stamp budget for a week seeing if you can live on that diet and also buy healthy food. Dr. Murthy said, "We need people who can become a uniter." I am a leader who can become a uniter. I am the future and the future is now and I need to think of ways that I can be a uniter today, tomorrow, next week, a month from now, and years to come. I remain optimistic that I and my fellow delegates in an age of negativity can make a difference.

Senate Parliamentarian Elizabeth MacDonough, besides Dr. Murthy, was one of the most inspiring speakers I heard. Besides being the first woman to be Senate parliamentarian her advice was concrete and to the point. Her advice to us was "maintain your own integrity and build credibility." I believe in years to come each delegate will use this advice.

Washington Week was one of the best weeks of my life. The United States Senate Youth Program inspired me, a small town girl from the Big Sky State of Montana, to help change the world. I am inspired by the friends I made and I am inspired that the young people I met in Washington, D.C. will soon lead our country. The political leaders and inspirational speakers along with the wonderful friends I made during Washington Week gave me the confidence that I too can make a difference on a local and national level. As the Surgeon General said, "Everybody has a deep well of potential." Washington Week helped me discover my potential.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to The Hearst Foundations and United States Senate Youth Program. I hope our paths cross again someday.