

Alyx Schmitz, ND – 2017

When I arrived at The Mayflower Hotel on March 4, I knew the week ahead held many opportunities, experiences, and relationships that would be cherished forever, but no words can truly forge the great impact my time at the United States Senate Youth Program has made on my life. The delegates, Military Mentors, USSYP staff, The Hearst Foundations, speakers, and everyone who made this week possible have influenced me and strengthened my passion for public service.

Between the early mornings and late nights were many intriguing conversations, time to listen and time to share, learning that could not be reciprocated in any classroom, and perhaps most notably the fostering of lifelong relationships. I am forever grateful to have been surrounded by such driven, confident, and intelligent people for a week. Considering the short amount of time our delegation shared together, the impact stems far beyond what time can measure.

At times the week was challenging, to call it a “once-in-a-lifetime” opportunity, we must consider that none of us had ever experienced a program of such caliber and vigor. I learned about myself, solidified my beliefs, and opened my eyes wider to the world outside of my state. With this, I realized that my perspective is unique and one that I desire to share with the world through a career in public service.

The conversation that ignited the spark in me the most was the one that I shared with my senator, Heidi Heitkamp. I had the opportunity to eat dinner with her at the National Archives building and I can say with confidence that the time that I shared with Senator Heitkamp was the highlight of my week and will serve as the greatest motivation moving forward pursuing my career goals. It is easy for us to read about and watch our lawmakers go about their daily lives and perceive them as a figure who seems larger than life, but having the opportunity to share a meal and a conversation with a United States senator really put her journey and her current, esteemed position into perspective. Senator Heitkamp reminded me that possible and easy are not synonymous, but neither are challenging and impossible. Her message of resilience and hard work motivates me to emulate the same passion that she has for our nation and its citizens. I was honored to give Senator Heitkamp’s introduction speech and am proud to have represented the North Dakota that we both call home.

I could not note the quality of Washington Week without elaborating on the extraordinary delegates. To each and every student that called The Mayflower Hotel home for one short week, I am humbled to be a part of a group of students who are destined to change the world, well-rounded, and ideologically diverse. I never knew how hard it could be to say goodbye to people I had only known for seven days, and that early Saturday morning came much too fast. I am thankful for the time spent with my fellow delegates during Washington Week, I am confident that I will be seeing their names in the headlines in the future, and I look forward to the next time in life that our paths will cross.

I will always remember the faith and trust that our speakers and Military Mentors placed on us throughout the week and in our futures. Our next steps in life are often sporadic and sometimes into unknown territory, but the journey teaches us more than our destination. I am thankful that the United States Senate Youth Program has been a part of my journey and blessed to have so many memories alongside such influential individuals in our nation’s capital. I will truly cherish the memories made during Washington Week forever.