

Matthew Fredricks, NE – 2017

The Best Week of My Life

Washington Week with the United States Youth Senate Program (USSYP) was a great experience for me, and I am inspired to get involved in our government in my life. Some of the interactions I had were truly life-changing, and I am extremely grateful for the opportunity. We had the most amazing lineup of speakers, some of whom were better than others, but all who genuinely cared about talking with one hundred and four of our country's top minds in the field of government. It was an action-packed schedule, with some great members of our military to protect us and guide us. Overall Washington Week was the best week of my life, and inspired me to push myself to my full potential.

The speakers we had were truly jaw dropping in the fact that we got to listen to such a wide variety of them from all parts of government. I greatly enjoyed meeting President Trump and Vice President Pence, and I am ecstatic they dedicated their time to meeting us. My personal favorite speaker was Chief Justice John Roberts, because of the great environment the Supreme Court and the chief justice provided for us. I greatly enjoyed getting to meet with him in the Supreme Court courtroom, and his willingness to talk to us. My favorite part was his openness about the current political and judicial climate. He even touched on the fact that he believed the judicial branch was taking on too much power, and took many questions from us.

Other great speakers I really enjoyed were Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, Executive Director of the Society of Cincinnati Jack Warren, and Israeli Ambassador Ron Dermer. The surgeon general was extremely matter of fact, and told us many things that would help us live our lives healthier. He wasn't partisan in most of his statements, and I really appreciated his sense of humor and knowledge. The executive director of the Society of Cincinnati was a personal favorite of mine, and I deeply enjoyed his sense of patriotism and pride in our country. I wholeheartedly agree with him that Americans need to be more appreciative of our Founding Fathers, and take that into account in the current political debates. He also wasn't afraid to answer politically charged and difficult questions and respected us as a group. Finally, I definitely enjoyed Ambassador Ron Dermer's time with us because he was extremely open about all of his opinions. Of all our speakers, I think he was the most forthcoming of his political views. He was obviously a strong proponent for Israel, and was partial to them, but that was understandable given his position. He took a lot of tough questions and definitely respected us as a group.

I personally wasn't a fan of Senator Cory Booker's message to us, because I believed it was very partisan and accusatory, and sounded like a stump speech. He had strong opinions on issues which is great, but he didn't acknowledge different points of views than his whatsoever. His speech was full of emotion, and very light on actual ways to fix any of the many problems he laid out. I did, however, appreciate his initiative to speak to us, and I recognize the time constraints he had to overcome to speak to us. I also wasn't a huge fan of Senator Heitkamp's message at first, but I began to like her more and more as she spoke to us several times. She was very impressing of her political views, but I enjoyed her confessions to us of her inner thinking and appreciated her willingness to think for herself on many issues where her stances crossed party lines.

The museums we went to were very interesting experiences, which really allowed us to interact with history at some of the nation's best institutions. However, I wish we would have had more time at these places and a better plan for investigating them. I feel we didn't know how to prioritize what to look at, and were scrambling around to do things. I also did not particularly enjoy our time at the United State Institute of Peace, because there was not near as much delegate participation as I was hoping for. We were taught a few basic concepts, but didn't get to dive into the details and debate with each other.

As far as the accommodations and travel arrangements, everything was first class. The Mayflower Hotel and its Grand Ballroom were absolutely stunning, and our buses and planes did a great job of getting us exactly where we needed to go. I also was astonished by the great quality of food that we had. The meals we had were the fanciest of my life, and I won't be eating like that again anytime soon.

The Military Mentors, especially my group leader Lieutenant Commander Worker, were extremely gracious to us, and definitely enhanced our great experience even more. I had the opportunity to talk to almost all of the Military Mentors, and they all were clearly greatly accomplished, and yet ecstatic to be with us. They took care of us in every situation, and did everything possible to give us the best experience possible. I definitely liked the assignment of groups to Military Mentors because it allowed me to form a close bond with the members of my group and our leader. I grew close enough to talk about anything with these guys, and was open about my political views even though most of them disagreed with me. I plan to stay in touch with these guys, and a few other delegates from USSYP for a long time to come, and I am even hoping to keep in touch with all 103 other delegates through our group message and social media.

By far my favorite experience of Washington Week was the opportunity to talk to all of the different delegates from all over the country. Every single one was a truly inspiring person to talk to, with different backstories and extremely different political views. However we all shared one common interest, the workings of government. I was able to connect with a lot of these people because I also have a strong interest in government, and love to discuss politics and current issues. I got into many friendly discussions with different delegates, and almost all of them gave me different feedback based on their different experiences and opinions. I learned that every political stance has many strong opponents from all across the country. I will definitely think more about my views because of these interactions.

My experiences in Washington have really lit a fire in me to pursue my dreams of getting involved in government at the most influential level possible, and I also have more resources to do it now. I want to pursue internships in government, and add some curriculum of law in college to help me understand our legislation more. I also want to study finance, economics, and the stock market in college, but I plan to transition into public service later in life. This plan may change, but I think no matter what, I will do what I can to help as many people as possible.

My experiences at Washington Week with other delegates, our Military Members, USSYP staff, and our many speakers were truly incredible. I will never be the same person as I was before Washington Week, because I know the great responsibility I have to get involved in government. I plan to stay in touch with my delegate friends for as long as possible, and get highly involved in the alumni association. Washington Week was a truly special experience for me, and one I will never forget.