

Sharon Lin, NY – 2017

When I received the phone call from The William Randolph Hearst Foundations that I had been selected for the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP), I would never have expected the experience of Washington Week to be as life-changing as it had been. Although I had heard about the program in the past, the sheer vastness of speakers, walking tours, and events was far more than I could have ever predicted.

Arriving in Washington, D.C., I was greeted with an assortment of students and professionals from past USSYP classes. For the next few hours, we discussed our current work, opinions on controversial issues affecting the government, and developed new friendships. Even before the week began, I was already met with an enormous amount of enthusiasm for government and law that extended far beyond my own experience in the fields.

Meeting our Military Mentors for the first time was one of my first highlights. I can never forget the anxiety and doubts in my mind before my assignment to Major Anne Boaden. Because of the lack of military presence within my own family, both meeting the Department of Defense students and the Military Mentors provided me with an alternative outlook onto the Armed Forces. I had never had the chance to simply appreciate their bravery and sacrifice, and it was a unique experience to be able to learn about the lives of the military officers.

During the week, we were also enjoyed an assortment of tours around Mount Vernon, the Anderson House, the Senate gallery, the Newseum, and other highlights of Washington, D.C. Not only did we speak directly to Chief Justice John Roberts, but we also had the chance to take photos with President Trump in the White House.

Apart from bus tours by the monuments and exploring the streets of the historic city, some of the most memorable moments came in between events, when we were having conversations with students across the country. One of the most unique aspects of the program was that students were selected from each of the fifty states and overseas. Having the diversity of perspectives regarding issues in politics, economics, and policy was refreshing, and it was certainly intellectually stimulating to be able to consider the validity of points made across the spectrum of opinions.

During the final days of the program, we were treated to a Shostakovich performance at the Kennedy Center, as well as speakers ranging from Senators Cory Booker and Heidi Heitkamp to an evening with the senators from our own states. I particularly enjoyed hearing Surgeon General Vivek Murthy speak about his experience in medicine, and how his childhood goal of making a positive impact on others shaped his career. The inspiration and advice that he provided was truly captivating, and it allowed me to consider how I can better serve others through my own work.

Whether it was dining by the National Archives or in the Library of Congress, our meals never fell short of exquisite, and the dinner conversations were as plentiful as the themed dishes we received. By the end of the week, it felt as if a lifetime had passed, and yet we were only on the brink of our careers. I had learned so much about our government simply through interacting with politicians and legislators, and even more about the numerous and unique states that make up our nation.

From the debates we held at 3:00AM to the laughs we shared on the long bus rides back to The Mayflower Hotel, I know that it will be difficult to forget the delegates I met at Washington Week. No matter where I turn, I continue to see their success grow through our interactions across borders. In the coming years, I certainly look forward to continuing to help support the USSYP, and I could not be more excited to become a part of its long-standing legacy of leadership and service.