

## Sydney Rowell, TN – 2017

Since stepping off the plane home from Washington, D.C. I have been asked countless times, “How was your trip to D.C.?” or “What was your favorite part?”

Every single time I give a different answer. Incredible, amazing, unbelievable, exhausting in the best way, stunning, and any other synonym of these words. My self-proclaimed favorite part is usually whatever the first memory that pops into my head is, ranging from walking in the first night to meeting the president.

The simple fact is that the week cannot be summed in one word or phrase. My experience at United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) was a synthesis of hundreds of emotions and experiences. Walking into the White House for the first time invoked a sense of awe I had never felt before. Laughing with my friends at a formal dinner over one of us dropping our bread roll reminds me of camaraderie and joy. Sitting in the beautifully cavernous Supreme Court in front of Chief Justice John Roberts as he described the place of law in democracy gave me goosebumps as I considered how the role he plays today may very well have unfathomable effects in the future. Watching Senator Cory Booker quite literally dash out of the banquet room made me contemplate the fast-paced lives these lawmakers live. Touring Mount Vernon on a cold Sunday afternoon reminded me of how far our nation has come and what an impact a single person can make. Pure joy and inspiration seeped from me when I surged forward against the wall of Military Mentors to catch a glimpse of Senator Elizabeth Warren, who empowers me as a woman in politics and by her unrelenting dedication to improving the lives of everyday Americans. Eating cookies with my friends in the Mayflower Ballroom late at night while the exhaustion from the day slowly crept upon us made me appreciate every day and realize how lucky I was to be surrounded by such amazing people. These big and small moments are what truly illustrate Washington Week.

One of the most enjoyable events was meeting my Tennessee senators, Lamar Alexander and Bob Corker, at the Senate Reception. As someone who is extremely passionate about education, meeting a former secretary of Education was absolutely incredible. Senator Alexander even took the time to tell us a quick story about his experience walking across parts of Tennessee to garner support. This story relates to an old folk tale in Tennessee, so hearing it from the man himself was as if Bigfoot was telling us about being caught walking around in the forest.

Over the course of the week I had the unparalleled opportunity to meet some of the most influential people in government, but the most inspiring people I met were my fellow delegates. Being surrounded by 103 of the intelligent, service oriented students in the United States challenged me and inspired me, but most importantly gave me hope for the future. I cannot wait to live in a country that is shaped by these incredible students. The future looks brighter after Washington Week.