

## Nicole Sanders, WY – 2017

“Best week of my life” is a commonly used phrase and often an exaggeration. However, it is an accurate way to describe the time I spent as a delegate from Wyoming at the United States Senate Youth Program. It somehow managed to be both lengthy and quick; each day was packed full of speakers and activities, but Friday came far too early for my liking. From the moment I met a few other delegates at the airport, I knew I was about to meet a new family. Every one of us came from a different background and offered diverse opinions, yet we all had one thing in common: an intense desire to better the world we live in. We had varying ways of accomplishing this through policy or careers, but I think each one of us agreed that the work is never done. The Senate Youth Program is obviously deeply steeped in government and public policy, but that was not the only thing we focused on. We heard from great political leaders like Senator Heidi Heitkamp, Senator Cory Booker, and President Trump, but we also had the opportunity to listen to Chief Justice John Roberts and Jefferey Herbst, CEO of the Newseum. We were exposed to all of the various ways and positions that can positively affect the world. Change can begin in both the public and private sector, and it can originate from a single person.

The most common question I have been asked about the program is who my favorite speaker was. My answer was never the same; sometimes it was the chief justice or the president or Senator Heitkamp or Bob Schieffer. There was not a single speaker that I did not enjoy or learn something from. In fact, many of them tried to impress one message upon us. We were constantly reminded that if we kept learning and kept fighting for what we believed in, we could impact the world. It was impossible for us to forget the power of a hardworking individual. Senator Heitkamp, Surgeon General Murthy, and Ambassador Dermer personally inspired me with their stories. I have always felt a pressure to have my entire life planned out and know exactly what I want to do. These speakers explained how unnecessary that is. They are three extremely successful individuals, yet they had no real plans when they were my age. None of them would have ever imagined they would be in the job that they are now, but their intelligence and drive pushed them to achieve greatness. Their stories reassured me that it was acceptable to be unsure; in fact, it can even be beneficial. Their open minds and flexibility led them to running for the Senate or accepting positions high up in government. These are just a few of the lessons I learned from the exceptional people I had the opportunity to hear from at Washington Week.

As a resident from Wyoming, I often have a hard time experiencing opportunities like the United States Senate Youth Program. My state has a low population but a big area, thus limiting resources available to students. In fact, I had never even heard about USSYP until a week before the application was due. I am so thankful that my counselor introduced me to this program, and I am so honored that I had the chance to attend. Every single person I met that week had a profound impact me, no matter the amount of interaction I had with them. My fellow delegates made me a more understanding and educated individual, my Military Mentor rejuvenated my patriotism, and the amazing speakers inspired me. I owe so much to The Hearst Foundations and the Senate Youth Program, and I can never truly express the intense impact Washington Week had on me.