

Maya Gee, HI – 2018

Dear Future United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) Delegates,

As you are about to embark on a one-week journey of a lifetime, I thought it would be helpful for me to provide some guidance as you go through Washington Week. As a small-town girl from the Big Island of Hawai'i, who loves D.C. from across an ocean, I felt extremely excited and anxious to attend and learn all I could from Washington Week. However, I also felt some insecurity about being in a group of highly motivated and "over-achieving" group of delegates.

I grew up as a home-schooled student who taught myself the core skills that I still use to this day, inside and outside the classroom. As a result, I have been an independent learner who is driven by my own desire to not only improve myself, but my community. At Washington Week, you will be surrounded by literally the BEST students in the nation, and I found this extremely intimidating. I was worried that I would feel drowned out by the empowered and driven voices of my fellow delegates, losing an opportunity to be an out-spoken and engaged delegate at Washington Week. However, I experienced the exact opposite.

The interactions that I had with my co-delegates not only inspired me to continue my work to improve my community, but empowered me to do even more than I did before. Hearing their stories and passions for their communities, and our nation, made me more passionate about sharing the story of my home and determined to make Hawai'i thrive as an island chain. What you will gain from the moments with your co-delegates during your meals, hang-outs in the Mezzanine, late-night dances, is that the passion and dedication they each have is infectious. It will make you question what else you can do to create a more effective public school classroom. It will make you question what else you can do to combat climate change. It will make you question what else you can do to end poverty and homelessness. It will make you question what else you can do to lead your community, state, and nation into the future.

To simply put it, do not let the prestige of your co-delegates cloud your confidence and voice to share your passion. The passions of my co-delegates relating to Black Lives Matter, Asian-American identity, gun control reform, etc. are forever in my memory and continue to inspire me to this day. Let Washington Week be the time for you to share your passion and leave your community's stories in the hearts of your co-delegates, like they did in mine. I wish you the best!

Aloha,

Maya Gee