

Catherine Miller, MO – 2018

After a few hours of my college visit road-trip, my family was ready to stop for dinner. As we had never driven through Iowa before, we had absolutely no idea what places locals would recommend. Although the idea of searching for an online review was broached, I knew who to contact - I had at minimum two friends from Iowa. This trend continued as when we arrived in Minnesota, I was as excited to meet up with another U.S. Senate Youth Program delegate as I was to see the city. Even before I suggested it, the Minnesota delegate knew that I would of course want to tour the state's Capitol. We marveled at the gorgeous views and caught up on each other's lives while touring a place that inspired some of the buildings we saw during Washington Week. Although this was my first reunion with another delegate, this was not the first time that I was incredibly grateful for these wonderful friends.

Although a large part of why Washington Week was so incredible was the speakers and experiences, I truly am appreciative of this opportunity to befriend all the other delegates. Having so many incredible experiences and being able to continue to speak to these new collaborators was something I'd written about in my application. I noted that although my interest was environmental policy, meeting all of these other students would be beneficial to learn about the whole government. One of the delegates in my small group was interested in astrophysics, so we bonded over our excitement for the group's visit to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. We had had a countdown to this event all week, and were so thrilled to have the opportunity to discuss our favorite topics in scientific policy. This is just one example of all of the ways I learned from the other delegates.

My notebook itself has become one of a symbol of what I brought back from Washington Week, because of all of the ideas it contains. Every time a speaker (or even another delegate) spoke about something I'd never heard of, I added it to a list in my journal. From George Washington's books to the history of various economic policies, I learned simply how many topics I'd love to learn about. I am so grateful to have had these experiences, and am so glad to have felt so inspired by the speakers that I want to learn more about what we discussed. Another treasured aspect of this journal is my list of ideas inspired by various talks. After hearing from the librarian of Congress, I wrote about my thoughts on accessibility to information. Because of an interesting conversation with a USSYP alum from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, I started thinking about environmental policy about disasters. By Saturday, my notebook was almost entirely full and contained dozens of ideas.

After Washington Week, I became even more excited about my political science major. I was inspired to read more periodicals, and so many of my political opinions have changed. All of these changes to my life as a result of Washington Week have only been supplemented by my bond with the other delegates. I love opening our delegation group-chat and hearing about all of the brilliant things that the other students are accomplishing, and I cannot wait to continue to maintain friendships with these kindhearted, inspiring people into the future. I know that all of the things I have learned from Washington Week will continue to be an important part of my life, and so will so many of the other delegates.