

Meera Kurup, NH – 2018

“Once in a lifetime.” A phrase you hear quite often to describe the one special experience or opportunity that could never be recreated in a lifetime. One that leaves a strong impact on you, shaking you to the core and making you question your preconceived beliefs or thoughts. Some may throw this phrase around randomly, losing the true meaning and value it holds. For me, the week I spent in Washington, D.C. at the United States Senate Youth Program was, without doubt, the “once in a lifetime” experience.

During Washington Week, the delegates and I heard from distinguished speakers from all sectors of public service. Each and every speaker emphasized the significance of our generation who will lead our country into a prosperous and peaceful future. A theme that was continuously acknowledged described our generation as “the generation for civility.” We must be open to learning from each other, be kind, and respect each other's opinions and beliefs with sincerity. These lessons are of utmost importance as policies in government can only truly be made this way. Political conversation cannot go anywhere without having civility and respect for each other's thoughts. As echoed by Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch and Former Chief Justice Robert Henry, everyone should be involved in civic conversation as it is the cornerstone of our democracy.

As a student passionate about technology and the STEM field, multiple venues and speakers stood out to me. Director of Cybersecurity Mr. Linus Barloon II spoke about the three components to cyber safety: people, technology, and process. By fostering the relationship among these key components, we can work towards keeping our country safe from the “bad guys” or hackers who steal secret information. With all the threats the United States faces today, I learned that technology plays a huge role in public service. A moment that stood out to me was when Dr. Tim Gallaudet from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) acknowledged the importance of STEM in our K-12 education. As a female STEM student who is passionate about working towards closing the technology gender gap, I was pleased to hear this issue is being recognized in public service and that there are many efforts underway in this area.

At the end of the day, meeting the president, vice president, and first lady of the United States of America was “once in a lifetime.” Hearing from a Supreme Court justice, U.S. congressman, and many distinguished members of our country was “once in a lifetime.” Meeting the two female New Hampshire senators, Senator Jeanne Shaheen and Senator Maggie Hassan, was “once in a lifetime”. Eating dinner near the original Constitution, walking inside the Pentagon, and watching Senator Bernie Sanders and Senator Elizabeth Warren from the Senate chamber was “once in a lifetime.” But in the end, being with a 103 of the greatest and smartest minds from around the country was truly “once in a lifetime.” I know for a fact that each and every delegate will make a difference in this world and work to create a brighter and better future for our country. I wouldn't trade anything in the world for the excitement, tears, laughs, or time I spent at the United States Senate Youth Program.