

Sophie A. Iglar, WI – 2018

My week in Washington D.C. was an extraordinary week that I will never be able to forget.

I never imagined that I could become so close with so many people of different backgrounds, experiences and ideas, meet a justice of the Supreme Court and two Cabinet secretaries, finally understand the rankings of the military, and listen to one of the most engaging stories of a Congressman who marched in Selma with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in one week.

I grew up in a family very involved in politics so I have always been interested in the political arena, our government and how it all fits together in a tenuous and very public way. The U.S. Senate Youth Program (USSYP) provided a unique view into the federal government and the individuals that work throughout D.C. and provided us with an in-depth view of our three branches of government.

I could go on for pages about the people we met, the stories we heard of people in positions behind the scenes, in the spotlight, and even some in roles I had never even dreamed existed, as well as places we saw and the VIP tours we were given, but I will have to mention the experiences that will stay with me forever. We were in the White House with the president, the first lady and the vice president a few short hours before it was announced the president would consider sitting down with the North Korea's leader to engage in talks. Congressman John Lewis told us his story as a civil rights leader including the famous march in Selma on the actual date of Bloody Sunday, March 7, fifty -three years later. We met people like Judge Robert Henry and the Deputy Director of FEMA, Brian Kamoie, who were both USSYP alum. Hearing about how USSYP truly altered their lives in terms of career paths and connections they still have with other USSYP alums made this entire experience even more real for me. We listened to Martin Baron, executive editor of the *Washington Post*, speak on how his goal of "ascertaining the truth in anyway the truth can be ascertained" has collided with government. Finally (although in reality I could write a novel about the 25+ guests we had the honor of meeting), we spent time with the newest justice of the Supreme Court, Justice Gorsuch. As someone very intrigued by our justice system, hearing Justice Gorsuch speak about everything from the inner workings of the Supreme Court to his favorite author to life lessons for us young people was incredible.

However, while shaking the hands of our national leaders and listening to the fascinating stories of their lives and their work was truly wonderful, the other students I had the privilege of getting to know is by far, the part of the experience I will cherish the most. These distinguished students from across our great country have restored my faith in the future of our democracy.