

Harriet "Hattie" Pimentel, WY - 2018

Where should I start?

From eating dinner with the Constitution, to meeting 103 other delegates, to listening to incredible speakers representing essential parts of our national government, the United States Senate Youth Program left me with a lot of unbelievable memories.

Maybe I should back up a bit.

The United States Senate Youth Program selects its 104 delegates from all fifty states, the District of Columbia, and the Department of Defense Education Activity. The application process varies by location, but selected delegates show interest in government and history. The delegates receive a scholarship generously sponsored by the Hearst Foundations and another opportunity of a lifetime - attending Washington Week to learn more about the United States government. As one of the two delegates from the state of Wyoming, I found the week to be an unforgettable one.

The majority of the United States Senate Youth Program was based on listening to speakers from all parts of government and asking them questions. I especially enjoyed listening to Senator Scott's engaging speech and Senator King's speech on ten pieces of advice for politics. It was fascinating to listen to the wide variety of speakers. We heard from the Senate Parliamentarian Elizabeth MacDonough, Congressman and civil rights leader John Lewis, and the Executive Editor of the Washington Post, Martin Baron. Listening to Justice Neil Gorsuch was a highlight for me. As the delegation moved through the impressive marble hallway leading up to the Supreme Court, I grew increasingly excited; my dream job would be a judge. After filing into the chamber, we listened to a background of the Supreme Court. After that, we listened and asked questions to Justice Neil Gorsuch! Eventually, I stopped writing notes in my journal and just tried to absorb every minute, but my favorite quote was (roughly) "there is nothing judges can do to save the republic if you don't."

Several times during the week I found myself admiring the ceiling in awe. Whether it was the rotunda of the Capitol Building, the ceiling of the Mayflower Hotel, or George Washington's dining room, visiting historical sites and memorials was another one of my favorite parts of the week. We had the opportunity to visit spectacular historic places that made history seem much more relatable than from a textbook. I especially liked our tour of Mount Vernon and the wreath laying ceremony at the Washington family's grave.

Another outstanding aspect of the program was the people. Of diverse backgrounds and opinions, the other delegates shared fascinating stories, mindboggling accomplishments, and well-spoken arguments for their political views. I don't know very many people in the military, so I was also fascinated to meet our Military Mentors. Many of them had seen areas of the world I have only read about and served their country in a variety of meaningful ways. From showing us pictures of their travels to giving inspiring impromptu speeches on the bus to rescuing a delegate in need of a cough drop, the Military Mentors added a lot to Washington Week. An important part of visiting Washington, D.C. is remembering those to whom we owe our freedom.

Washington Week was an outstanding experience! I have countless memories from the week that I won't forget; among them are seeing the chunk of twisted steel from the Twin Towers in the Newseum, meeting my senators, and visiting the White House. I want to thank the United States Senate Youth Program staff, the Military Mentors, and the Hearst Foundations for giving me this amazing opportunity!