

Catherine Daniel, AL – 2019

People oftentimes realize their lives have been changed only in hindsight; never fully understanding the impact of a moment until it is finished. Washington Week changed my life, and yet I never appreciated this fact until I was on the plane headed back home. This week cannot be described in words, but I will try to do so.

Washington Week is a time when tomorrow's leaders are able to come together and meet with policy leaders and influential government officials. More importantly, they are able to meet with each other. It seemed that everyone at the program came from a different background, even those delegates that were from the same state. Even so, we were able to come together and form friendships and bonds that will last a lifetime. I know without a doubt that we will stay in touch, and every delegate will have at least two friends from every state to call on in case they need help.

In my opinion, the most special place that we visited was the Vietnam Wall. My great-uncle fought in the Vietnam War, but he was killed when a trap detonated near him. His death is still painful for my family to discuss, so getting to see his name on the wall was very important to me. It took some searching, but with the help of a few friends, I was able to find my great-uncle's name. Finding his name made me feel closer to him, and I will never forget that feeling.

The most memorable moment of my trip to Washington, D.C. was when we met with President Trump. Everyone, no matter their political beliefs, was tingling with excitement as we waited for the president to make his entrance. When he did, he started off our meeting by making jokes and talking with us about some of the senators in Congress. After the picture was taken, President Trump shook the hand of everyone within reach. I will never forget what it felt like to shake the hand of the president of the United States, and it remains the highlight of my trip. It was so thoughtful of him to take time out of his busy schedule and meet with us.

An aspect of this trip that is just as influential as meeting government officials is interacting with our Military Mentors. I was fortunate enough to have Lieutenant Karlin Foor serve as my Military Mentor. I did not know much about the Coast Guard, but after speaking with Lieutenant Foor, I now understand the vital role the Coast Guard plays in defending and protecting the United States. Our Military Mentors were inspirations to everyone that attended Washington Week.

I am so honored to have been selected to attend Washington Week. This program was the opportunity of a lifetime, and I know that my life has changed because of my week in Washington. I am grateful to the Hearst Foundations for giving me this opportunity, and I cannot wait to see how the delegates from the 2019 United States Senate Youth Program change the world.