

Ava Daugherty, DC – 2019

They say you never realize what you have until it's gone. Luckily for me, the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) allowed me to realize the full extent of what I have as a resident of Washington, D.C. before my time here has elapsed. Many D.C. residents love living here, but have the cloud of disenfranchisement hanging over them. That cloud has not yet been disbursed, yet I have come to appreciate D.C. in a light that I likely never would have otherwise.

During Washington Week, I visited historically and contemporarily important locations in the area such as Mount Vernon, the Capital, and the White House. I also visited one of the only museums in D.C. that I had not previously seen: the Newseum. There, and on the very first day of the program, we heard from the speaker who resonated with me more than any other. Jack D. Warren of the Society of the Cincinnati is a Revolutionary war historian, and an excellent orator. He spoke to us about the immense effects that the Revolutionary War had and continues to have on the direction of politics to this day due to the beginning of independence, the formation of the republic, the emergence of the national identity, and what seemed most important to me, the birth of ideals such as liberty, equality, and natural versus civil rights.

In lieu of his exact words, I can say that civil rights are bound by public necessity, and natural rights are the immutable, inalienable, and universal rights of all people. His speech was important to me because it made the link between the historical sites that we saw throughout the week and the political philosophy that fellow delegates and I argued about in every spare moment. From D.C. statehood, to women's rights, the Green New Deal, and immigration policies, every stroll down hallowed hallways and each breath between bites of food were filled with honest debate between 103 other people who were genuinely interested in learning about the perspectives of other people.

Each of our keystone speakers provided us with their experiences, insight, and perspective, and then held on through the inevitable torrent of tough questions from delegates. I like to think they were so receptive to our many questions because they too remembered what it felt like to be an inquisitive young mind. I believe that many of my fellow delegates will become political individuals worthy of being USSYP capstone speakers in the future. The USSYP experience is one of a kind not only because of its impressive itinerary, but also because the delegates are comprised of highly intelligent, highly driven, and highly cooperative young students. 104 of us came together and set a tone of open debate and the sharing of ideas, which allowed for bipartisan understanding that I hope will continue into the future.