

Yuxuan "Alice" Geng, MN – 2019

No amount of Facebook introductions and constant refreshing of emails for the program speaker list could have prepared me for Washington Week with the other 103 delegates and seventeen Military Mentors. From the instant that I stepped into the Grand Ballroom of the Mayflower, an incredible energy from United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) delegates, alumni, and staff embraced me. Hours felt like minutes as I conversed with my fellow delegates and USSYP alumni about everything from the overall program experience to famous movies set in our hometowns.

Throughout the week, I kept thinking to myself: did that just happen? Yes, I just asked Chief Justice Roberts a question. Yes, Chief Justice Roberts just disclosed that he prefers Michael Jordan over LeBron James — one of many unexpected but cherished memories from Washington Week. I left the United States Supreme Court with not only an unforgettable experience but also two great book suggestions from the Chief Justice himself.

Despite differing greatly in general political ideology and stances on current administration's policies, I genuinely valued the opportunity that we had to listen to speakers like Senator Joni Ernst, Secretary Carson, and Secretary Pompeo. My USSYP experience constantly challenged my viewpoint and brought invaluable discussions with my fellow delegates on controversial topics. The program created an environment where delegates ask tough questions, discuss tough questions, and answer tough questions. To quote Ms. Martha Raddatz, "They didn't get to their positions because they can't answer questions."

Washington Week also expanded my knowledge about the military through our amazing seventeen Military Mentors and our time with speakers at the Pentagon. Our Military Mentors contributed to our mealtime discussions and never backed away from difficult questions. For delegates without significant military connections in their lives, the Military Mentors' diversity in experience and interests truly transformed delegates' perspective towards the military and its opportunities. I want to give a special thank you to my Military Mentor Lieutenant Foor, for she exemplified the meaning of a *mentor*.

To my fellow delegates, I could not imagine having a better group of people to share all the unique opportunities during Washington Week. I truly do not know another group of high school students who can passionately and civilly discuss seemingly anything from theology to transnational crime prevention. I look back at our pictures and cannot help but see future senators, ambassadors, and movement leaders.

Thank you for making me think, laugh, and listen.