

Caleb Hendrickson, NE – 2019

A small town kid in a big world. I hail from Shickley, Nebraska, population 341. That being said, I wasn't a stranger to D.C. I'd attended Boys Nation the previous summer and visited my aunt who worked in the Hart Senate office during Senator Ben Nelson's tenure in Washington. But the lens that I saw our nation's capital during the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP)'s Washington Week was unlike any other experience I have ever been through. The Grand Ballroom of the Mayflower was breathtaking, the history behind it, unfathomable. The people inside the room on arrival day were the reason that it was unforgettable. The days to follow would set in stone that very sentiment.

As I stated, the people of this week were what made it unforgettable, but that doesn't mean the sights weren't amazing as well. Washington Week opened with a visit to Mount Vernon followed by lunch at the Newseum. It was there we listened to our first speaker. Jack Warren, a Revolutionary War historian and an executive director of the Society of the Cincinnati may have been the most foremost expert of our past from the week. Every statement provoked thought and forced you to reexamine things that seemed trivial. The Newseum was our history put on display in the biggest way possible, and at times was even emotional. But I cannot begin to go through each and every part of Washington Week. I leave this first day summary as a hint as to what will follow. I doubt all the words in the world could describe it sufficiently. Even though we met powerful people, visited impressive places, and were exposed to our government's inner workings, one thing was more valuable than all. The people.

David Ocks. Keven Zhang. Jarret Carnes. Adam Pack. Rohan Shah. David Fillmore. Ruben Banks. Last, but certainly not least, Nitin Prashar. Just a few names of random individuals to most. But to me, these men are my brothers. I made countless lifetime friends over the course of Washington Week, but my group became who I was closest with. But the craziest part of Washington Week was not the bond with my group, but with each and every delegate. I didn't have the chance to speak with every person personally during the week, but no matter where I turned, there was an engaging conversation to have. A new perspective on an issue hurting our country. I learned the challenges that other Americans outside my home state face. I was thrown into heated debates concerning issues both foreign and domestic. And every person, and I do mean every, was qualified and educated about issues.

I was asked to reflect on Washington Week, and above is a small taste of what the week entails. Peers that will be lifelong friends, you'll participate in unimaginable activities, and most importantly, your views and thoughts will be challenged. Very few times do I find myself speechless, but yet again here I am. To the Hearst Foundations, thank you. The value of this program cannot be understated, and the gratitude I have for your foundation is impossible to display in words. To my group, thank you for pushing me to test my perspectives, to force me to reexamine my political and world views. To Captain Prashar, thank you for being a rock throughout the week. And to the delegates former and future, go change the world. Thank you.