

Siddharth Nareddy, CO – 2024

As I walked into the Mayflower ballroom with the other delegates from all over the nation who I had just met, I did not know what exactly to expect. Going into Washington Week, I had been told countless times that it would truly be an experience of a lifetime, and yet I was still not prepared for just how true this simple statement would be.

As civically engaged young people, every one of the delegates was acutely aware of the impacts of political polarization and the unprecedented breakdown of effective discourse in our society. The starting presentation of the week from Mr. Bill Doherty of Braver Angels spoke about this, and a point from his presentation that resonated with everyone and set the tone for the week was the importance of building bridges in an environment that seeks to divide. Over the course of the week, I sought to build bridges through the invaluable conversations that I would have with my fellow delegates. From living in the same community for my entire life, I embraced the opportunity to learn from the diverse perspectives of my peers who came from every corner of the nation and even the world. Even when we stood on completely different positions on topics, we built bridges that spanned this ideological divide by utilizing our shared desire for conversation and understanding. With this understanding, we came to realize that we had far more commonalities than differences, especially in our aspirations of serving our respective communities and having meaningful impact.

With the speakers that we heard from throughout the week, from hearing from influential individuals such as Secretary Pete Buttigieg or General Charles Brown, Jr., we got to hear from people who exemplified the ideals of change that my fellow delegates and I dreamed of. I especially resonated with the words of Mr. Brian Kamoie, a USSYP alum, and his stories from working in several crisis management leadership positions. He emboldened us to “face the boisterous sea of liberty and face our challenges from the helm.” His message of rising to the challenges that our modern society poses was inspiring to me because he sat in our shoes many years ago, with the same dreams for change that we had, and he realized these dreams.

Though these specific speakers were extremely influential for me, my Washington Week experience was defined by the culmination of every single speaker and the unique perspectives that they brought with them. Over the course of the week, whether it be hearing from various officials working in the Department of State or the Department of Justice, I was able to learn more about the innermost workings of our government and how it works to effectively serve the people. These experiences opened my eyes to the countless opportunities that were present to enact meaningful change and redefined my understanding of what it means to be a public servant.

Stepping off the plane at the end of Washington Week, I brought back something that I had never expected to find. A brilliant flame of hope that was fueled by the invaluable memories of the week and a promise that my fellow delegates and I made to work toward a better tomorrow.