

Bryson Riggleman, WV – 2024

Washington Week was one of the most exciting weeks of my life and this is no exaggeration. How many people get to meet the President and hear from a Supreme Court Justice in the same week! Yes, meeting those respected leaders was a great thing, but on a deeper level it helped foster the principles of the United States Senate Youth Program; Education, Leadership, Public Service, and Respect.

On the very first night at the Mayflower Hotel, I realized that I was in a room full of like-minded people from across the country, and that deep down we all wanted to see our country succeed. I enjoyed guest speaker Bill Doherty and the way he prepared our minds for the week ahead. Brian Kamoie, Katherine Scott, Associate Justice Kagan, Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg, and Judy Woodruff were all excellent at building upon the theme of Washington Week. All the speakers mentioned gave me the best sense of how our government works together.

I could not pick a favorite event during the week. However, there are two that I thoroughly enjoyed - visiting the Supreme Court and eating dinner in the National Archives Rotunda. As a history buff, these two experiences were a dream. As soon as we walked into the court, I immediately noticed the elegance of the building's interior. Just when I thought this couldn't get any better, we walked into the Courtroom. I sat in the same room that the legal course of our nation was shaped in. *Brown v. Board of Education*, *Miranda v. Arizona*, and *U.S. v. Nixon*, all decided in the very room at sat in. As a prospective lawyer, this was a surreal experience and one that I will never forget.

The National Archives is commonly known for being the home of our nations' founding documents. I was able to learn about the other functions of the National Archives and even saw artifacts such as Rosa Parks' fingerprint card from her 1955 arrest for refusing to give up her seat on an Alabama bus. Many people can see the Constitution, Bill of Rights, and Declaration of Independence, but how many eat dinner in the same room! The importance of preserving our history was certainly expressed at the Archives and made me realize when need to put more emphasis on our country's history. The gravity of both experiences was immeasurable, and one I think that future USSYP Delegates must attend Washington Week helped me grow as a person. I was able to meet people from across the country and learn about their cultures and ways of life. I saw firsthand how our government works from the Secretaries all the way up to the President. Not just what the media says, or the history books read, but actual government in action. It inspired me to continue my public service and education so I can be a productive member of society and help others in the process. There is no price tag or bank account big enough to encompass the value of this program. The inspiration that was sparked during this program was only a domino effect that will continue to influence others around the country, and even the world.