

## Ethan Yang, HI – 2025

“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

Never had that proverb felt more true than when I sat shoulder-to-shoulder with 103 of the most ambitious teenagers in the country, all of us in awe of the astronauts speaking at NASA headquarters. Because the most memorable part of Washington Week wasn't the grandeur of the Mayflower Hotel or even the exquisite USSYP desserts (though they're up there)—it was the wisdom imparted by our nation's leaders and the remarkable trailblazers who surrounded us. That, I'm sure, we would all agree on.

Washington Week was nothing short of life-changing. For seven exhilarating days, sleep was cast aside as we tried to record every word and feeling in our impressively traveled blue notebooks. From the very first day, we were encouraged to “spend a week in another's news,” seek opposing views with compassion and curiosity, and foster productive dialogue. Minutes later, I was surprised to find vast common ground as we discussed the root causes of exacerbated political polarization and the urgent need for compromise in today's age. That shared desire for progress transformed doubt into confidence—confidence that in the days to come, we might refine not only our values but how we live them.

One of my fondest memories was hearing from Associate Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh in the neoclassical palace that is the Supreme Court of the United States. I remember sitting in the gallery, heart pounding, expecting black robes and a formal, dominating presence. But the conversation that followed dismantled the tension in my knees as we all rose to his entrance. He compared his prestigious role to the referees at his daughter's soccer games, shared that he and Associate Justice Neil Gorsuch had the same high school government teacher, and described the deep relationships he and his fellow justices cultivate behind the bench. In his closing, he urged us to be optimists: “Live on the sunrise side of the mountain to see the day that is coming and not the day that has gone.” The details of that hour may one day fade—but the awe I felt descending those marble steps in the chilly spring air, hopefully not for the last time, will never leave me.

What I didn't anticipate was how much I would learn from the moments not written into the little white pamphlet agendas. On the final day, the best Military Mentor group at Senate Youth, Vikram's Vikings, gathered at the narrow end of the fourth-story hall for a final debriefing. My military commander, Lieutenant Commander Vikram Kanth, challenged us to define success for ourselves and to make it deeply personal. Washington Week and my peers taught me that real success creates ripples—uplifting others as it rises forward and sweeps up all those that surround it.

In the words of my dear friend Terry Shen, we are distinctly different, yet similarly ambitious. I know my 103 life-long friends will channel their drive into building the world of tomorrow. By building something bigger than ourselves, we create meaning in our one wild and precious life.

For together, we will go far.