

Isaac Vosburg, IA – 2025

Hi! I'm Isaac, one of the two Iowa delegates from this year's United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP), and I write this essay on April 1st, exactly one month after USSYP 2025 officially kicked off. In that month, I've had the chance to savor the memories of my Washington Week experience, and as such, I believe I am now best equipped to reflect upon them in such a format as follows. With my prologue now adjourned, I draw your attention to the essay below and thank you for your time in reading this.

If I were to add another alliterative word to "Washington Week," it would be "whirlwind." While I could, and will, walk you through my most memorable and impactful moments from the week at large, it is worth noting that I will never be able to adequately sum up in words what this opportunity has meant to me—the doors it opened, the ideas it instilled, or the relationships it cultivated. Washington Week was more than just a packed agenda with stars of government service scheduled to address us, more than any one speaker's words of wisdom to our class of 104, and more than any single friendship that blossomed as a result of our time spent together. As I said, the most fitting word I find is "whirlwind," as all my memories of Washington Week have become inseparable from one another. I cannot remember listening to Secretary of State Marco Rubio discuss with us quite frankly and sincerely about finding a career tailored to fulfillment and impact rather than salary without thinking too of the conversations about his genuineness I had with my friends thereafter. I cannot fathom meeting both of my Senators at the Annual Senate Reception on Wednesday without harkening back to the message of Bill Doherty and Braver Angels on learning to disagree better and how, at the end of the day, politicians are people too.

These memories, these moments, are intertwined with one another in such a manner that to inspect one aspect of Washington Week is to examine its whole—whether by intention or not. When asked about my experience at the United States Institute of Peace, for example, memories immediately arise like the carbonation after cracking the lid on a freshly dropped bottle of Coke. I clearly envision Ambassador George Moose's speech, laying out the vital work of the Institute under the assumption that "while peaceful conflict is inevitable, violent conflict is not." I remember coming up and speaking with him afterward, bringing up how he had gone to the same small Iowa college that I would be headed to in the fall, swapping stories as he shared advice. I remember eating dinner, conversing with delegates of opposing political stances than my own, and using the incredibly pertinent setting as a means to forward the discussion without argument obstinately taking center stage. I hear once more the words of Ambassador Ana Luisa Fajer, as she earnestly discussed working in collaboration, not subordination on the international stage, and how immigration is a shared responsibility. Most of all, however, I remember the genuineness of that evening—the hope that was sparked within me.

This one example serves as a metaphor in miniature for Washington Week as a whole: listening to life-changing speakers, some of whom hold the highest offices in this land; participating in enlightening conversations with my peers, regardless of viewpoint or opinion; visiting settings home to some of the most incredible architecture this country has to offer; and making connections with all manners of individuals thanks to a shared belief in our future. Who would have thought that someday a student from Hampton, Iowa would be sitting in the chamber of the Supreme Court of the United States of America, listening to an Associate Justice of said court speak to and answer questions of our group? Or for that matter, be admitted inside the Pentagon and listen to the Secretary of Defense do the same? Not I, and yet, Washington Week was my experience just as much as was the delegate to my left or right's. All accounted for, it has become rather clear to me that my eyes have been opened now to a world of new understanding and perspective thanks entirely to this program.

The only topic I find fitting yet to touch on is that of representation. As one of two co-delegates from my state, it is of course abundantly clear that this program is modeled after the Senate itself. What was not immediately apparent, however, is how incredibly rewarding it would be to not only represent my state in this capacity, but also my community. Hailing from a county of less than 10,000 people and a town of nearly 4,000, to return home and say that I have heard from figures ranging from NASA Astronauts to the Librarian of Congress or arranged a voting system with my co-delegate incorporating our state's unique practices is simply astounding. To have met so many like-minded peers sharing the same visionary dreams as I, was in and of itself a dream come true, for those opportunities are few and far between where I come from. In closing, I simply state this: Washington Week ranks among the most impactful and memorable moments of my entire life, and in accordance with Senate Resolution 324, I do wholeheartedly believe that my "short indoctrination into the operation of the United States Senate and the Federal Government generally," as sponsored and arranged by the Hearst Foundations, has been as great a success as I could otherwise fathom.

I am in awe of the future that has now been set before me as a result of my participation in this program: the friends I have maintained, the connections with all manners of government servants, and the mindset and perspective through which I now view the world. This whirlwind of a week has left me feeling no greater emotion than gratitude, and it is for this that I thank you.