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On the other side of the United States Senate Youth Program, I see that my wildest hopes are realized. Reading my notebook unravels memories of a truly once-in-a-lifetime experience. More than that, it is a life-defining experience, a point I know I will connect my future achievements back to.

Questions were a central part of Washington Week. On arrival day, Bill Doherty from Braver Angels established questions as a path to understanding. His message about working against polarization set the empathetic tone continually developed through conversations and listening to speakers.

This tone encouraged me to form a mental dialogue with the speakers. During Justice Kavanaugh's speech, it was extremely exciting to take what I already knew about the court, his stances, and recent events in the context of how he presented himself. Beyond only Justice Kavanaugh, this program helped me take outlines of prominent people and start to fill in a picture, realizing more of their complexity.

My analytical questions did not prevent me from seeing the caring attitude reflected by every speaker. Each person who took a mic before us had a lesson they believed would help us in our future and sacrificed their time to bring this message to us. Katherine Scott, the Senate Historian inspired me with her tales of individual impact, and at the State Department, the words of Secretary Rubio and Michelle Exner particularly struck me. The authenticity displayed in their messages excited me for my self-discovery and public service ahead.

But the conversations I had with "delegates and distinguished guests" are what stuck out the most. Having the opportunity to speak to Senator McConnell was a great honor. He has left an undeniable impact on Kentucky and the entire United States, and his hospitality in allowing us to visit his office showed me the behind-the-scenes of how Kentucky is represented on Capitol Hill. However, this program deepened my understanding of the importance of the overlooked contributors in our country. At the United States Institute of Peace dinner, I sat next to an employee who worked in water resource management in Afghanistan; the complexities and labor required to maintain peace around the globe became more apparent to me. There were countless guests, Hearst Foundations staff, and Military Mentors who impacted the way I think. Finally, speaking to delegates from across the country was life-defining. I will not soon forget the way they shared their passions or the way we laughed, smiled, and danced together. I am extremely excited to see the amazing things they do.

There is an overflow of passion for understanding in our generation and our world; much more than I had thought. My belief that people are always striving to be a better version of themselves and build a better world was deepened by my experiences during Washington Week. When Brain Kaiome encouraged us to "always be a helper," I felt a tug towards serving others, no matter our stances. Depolarizing my view of the world starts with recognizing the helper in those I do not agree with. Then, I must look to be a true helper to all people and in all situations, even when I face doubts.

Like many delegates, I was plagued with a self-doubt often called "imposter syndrome." Through the kindness of several Military Mentors and friends, I realized an environment with some of the most accomplished young people across the country was the place to embrace opportunity instead of receding into self-doubt. To future delegates, I would like to offer the mantra that helped me beat back imposter syndrome. *If someone saw something in me that meant I was worthy of being here, why should I doubt that I possess potential? If I was given this opportunity, why should I worry more about my worthiness than making the most of it? If I feel like an imposter, why can't I strive to be the person I think I am imitating?* Reframing my doubts as questions, I gained more confidence to actively participate in my experiences.

Now, I know my experiences with USSYP do not end after one week. My time spent at Washington Week will be the fuel to carry me to my next great heights. As I go through life, I will be inspired to show more care to the pressing issues my fellow delegates exposed me to, listen with empathy and without expectation, and beat back self-doubt with action. I will be eternally grateful to the people who put this week together. When I think of USSYP, I will be reflecting on the people who cared enough to leave me with these life-defining impacts.