

Washington Week Reflection

The United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) was truly an unparalleled experience that exceeded all of my expectations. Washington Week was more than just a trip to the nation's capital - it was a transformative experience that deepened my understanding of leadership, government, and the importance of dialogue. From the incredible access we were given, to the dedicated leaders we met, every moment was both inspiring and humbling. Most of all, it was the extraordinary group of my fellow delegates who left the greatest impact on me after the week. I know the connections we made will last far beyond our time in the capital.

One of the most incredible aspects of the week was the opportunity to engage in direct conversations with our nation's leaders and have frank discussions with them. We weren't just given prepared speeches and talking points. Our speakers engaged directly with us and encouraged us to ask tough questions. Having frank conversations with Senators, a Supreme Court Justice, The Secretary of State, and the Secretary of Defense was truly transformative. It was in these moments of dialogue that you could feel the room rise above partisanship and all that remained was a shared love for our nation. Seeing our government in this light, not as Democrats or Republicans but as Americans, gave me a renewed sense of hope for our country.

Something rather unique about my Washington Week experience was the level of interaction I was able to have with my Senator. I was very lucky as one of my Senators, Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), was this year's Democratic Co-Chair of the program. I was able to see her and learn from her three times throughout the week, which was truly special. We had dinner with her and learned about her amazing career, not just in the Senate, but as a schoolteacher, a state Senator, and the first female Governor in our state. Hearing about her journey into public service was deeply inspiring; there was so much more to her story than meets the eye. She spoke with honesty, humility, and a passion that made a lasting impression on me. With a tear in her eye, she reflected on her first time working in politics, working for President Jimmy Carter. While I may not always agree with her policies, I will forever be inspired by her dedication, empathy, and lifelong commitment to serving others. I will always look up to her as a model of public service.

What inspired me most, however, was the extraordinary group of fellow delegates I had the distinct privilege to learn alongside. My fellow delegates were some of the most impressive people I have ever met. They are leaders in their communities, accomplished students, advocates for change, and visionaries for the future. What stood out to me even more than anyone's résumé was how much each and every delegate cared for our country and for each other. Throughout the week we didn't just exchange opinions with each other - we looked to understand where those opinions came from. Our discussions often lasted late into the night, as we learned about each other's experiences, backgrounds, and beliefs. There was truly a genuine desire to learn from one another, not just to debate each other, but to grow from one another. That was the single most inspiring thing I saw during Washington Week. In today's political climate, our divisions are so often what defines us, so a space filled with thoughtful, compassionate leaders gave me immense hope for our future.

There was not a single dull moment in the entire week. If we were not meeting with Senators, then we were meeting with astronauts. If we weren't touring the White House, then we were viewing the founding documents. Even the bus rides from location to location were never dull; they were filled with songs, get-to-know-you games, and thoughtful conversations. I find it truly incredible that 104 students who had never met each other could come together, and after one week be the closest of friends.

As I return home, I carry with me not just a greater knowledge of government, but a renewed sense of civic purpose and duty, and new hope for the future of the United States. This experience reaffirmed my desire to pursue a career in law and public service. It reshaped how I view my civic responsibility, making it a daily commitment. The United States Senate Youth Program gave me so much more than just incredible memories and connections; it gave me renewed hope for our country. And for that, I will always be grateful for such a transformative week.