

Uxue Sansinena, NM – 2025

When applying to attend Washington Week, I told my committee that the opportunity to visit Washington for the first time would make the political hub of the United States feel real—tangible in a way no longer limited to the confines of a televised debate or news reporting. After being selected as one of the 104 student delegates from around the country, I can wholeheartedly confirm that this experience has made me more passionate about the world of politics and has ignited in me a new appreciation and respect for those involved in public service.

One of the first speakers to greet us at Washington Week was Mr. Bill Doherty, Co Founder of Braver Angels. Through his words, he set the tone of the program, encouraging us—despite some of our long day of travel—to engage thoughtfully in honest discussions about one of the most challenging issues in American politics: political polarization. And it was from this point that I knew that this would be one of the most transformative weeks of my life. Within hours of landing in DC, I found myself critically analyzing questions such as “how do we have productive disagreements with those on the other side of the political spectrum?” and breaking down how we grow empathy for others. Mr. Doherty, sharing his views, expanded my understanding with the simple phrase “don’t be afraid to live in the other side’s news.” Though simple on the surface, Mr. Doherty’s message hit deep into the importance of seeing others’ perspectives, realizing that each side of any debate has intelligent people with relevant information, and that one should never be afraid to grow their knowledge. After all, what is the worst that could happen? You modify your opinion.

Two days into the program, we visited the Supreme Court room, a place that holds the potential to impact the rights and daily lives of citizens across the country, with impressive architecture that reminds all who step inside of its significance. And, as we sat there waiting for Justice Kavanaugh to speak with us, the weight of his title set in. I can confidently say that I never expected him to come in and liken the Supreme Court to the referees at little league sports games. Yet, in doing so, Justice Kavanaugh imparted yet another important lesson from Washington Week: the titles people hold do not negate their humanity. Throughout our question and answer period, Justice Kavanaugh continued to provide us with glimpses into his personal values and background, speaking to us not as a Supreme Court Justice with unimaginable responsibilities, but as a mentor ready to shape young minds. Along with his analysis of the Supreme Court and his role within it, he also included sentiments such as “strive to live on the sunrise side of the mountain; see the day that is coming, not the day that has gone.” While any one of us delegates could have looked up information about the Supreme Court, this first-hand experience provided more than just logistical insight into Justice Kavanaugh’s job; it created a space where we learned lessons that we could apply to our own lives.

Beyond connecting us with people directly involved in political decision-making, the United States Senate Youth Program also ensured that we heard from those who make an impact through other means. We heard from a variety of speakers. Carla Hayden, Librarian of Congress and Jackie Barber, Secretary of the Senate, emphasized that those in the limelight are only able to shine through the work done behind the scenes. Meanwhile Ryan Nobles, Chief Capitol Hill Correspondent for NBC News highlighted the role of media as a bridge between politics and the American people. While the image of a politician speaking on a bill may be the first thing that pops into someone’s head upon hearing the word “politics,” it became apparent with each speaker that this realm spans much further and encompasses many more figures that often fly more under the radar. As a result, I found a new appreciation for these roles that—though seemingly peripheral—play a crucial part in sustaining our institutions.

Taking a step back from the insightful speeches we were exposed to, I am also incredibly grateful for the relationships I formed with my fellow delegates and our Military Mentors.

Being surrounded by passionate, driven, and accomplished individuals from all fifty states made my time in DC both memorable and inspiring. All 104 of us were selected due to our shared commitment to public service and leadership. Yet, what stood out to me was the incredible diversity of interests and goals that shaped our journey to Washington Week and made for rich, engaging conversations. From meeting polyglots and switching languages mid-conversation, to meeting our fellow international delegates, to speaking with people with varied

backgrounds in policy, medicine, physics, history, and wide-ranging service activities, I found myself constantly learning—both from our speakers and from one another. Each unique perspective helped shape our time into one of curiosity, connection, and shared purpose, which I believe is what makes Washington Week so special.

And our time spent with our Military Mentors further enhanced this sentiment. Having the privilege of getting to know some of our nation's brightest and most dedicated service members instilled in me a great respect and admiration for every person fighting for our country as I heard about their military careers. Furthermore, hearing that many of them had at least one loved one that lay in Arlington National Cemetery when we visited further cemented my deep gratitude for their service and sacrifice that allows us to strive for success and happiness in our country. Outside of their military duties, each mentor also had rich and admirable knowledge in vast fields of study and I was inspired to hear mentors saying that, on top of their work for our country, they were preparing for law school or worked in political strategy or were pilots and engineers on their bases. They were all also incredibly kind and giving people who would not hesitate to help a delegate, share their knowledge, or answer questions. The flag now hanging in my room, gifted to me at the end of Washington Week, not only serves as a memory of the week, but as a reminder of each Military Mentor and the lessons they imparted in me.

So, one last time, thank you to the Hearst Foundations for providing this incredible opportunity to students like myself and all 103 of my peers at the 63rd annual Washington Week. Each minute of the trip helped mold me into a more knowledgeable, educated, and passionate individual and I know we will all carry the lessons we learned into the next stages of our lives. And finally, we spent the week hearing from leaders that told us we are the future—that in the crowd sits a future senator or diplomat or even president of the United States. It is now up to us to carry the burden of proving every member of this organization that they made the right call in putting us in that room and that we are individuals who will continue to lead with purpose, curiosity, and integrity. It is up to us to rise to the occasion and become changemakers.