

Washington Week: An Experience of a Lifetime

If I were to characterize the Washington Week experience from the United States Senate Youth Program in a single phrase, I would describe it as life-changing. From the places we visited to the people we met, to the experiences we had, our week together in our nation's capital was truly unforgettable. It is a challenge, to sum up Washington Week in a brief statement as one, it was an extremely comprehensive program that contained all aspects of our federal government within it, and two, because it meant so many different things to each delegate. The program brings together two students from every state and two students from the District of Columbia and from the Department of Defense Education Activity to form a group of youth that in the case of our class, grew exceptionally close and completed this learning journey in collaboration and in support of one another. Outside of delegate interactions, we learned from experienced public officials and public servants. My fellow co-delegate, Mr. Christopher Lee, and I had the opportunity to meet our Senators from Nevada, Senator Catherine Cortez Masto and Senator Jacky Rosen. It was impressive how much they knew about the inner workings of our state government. They even knew about the current activities of the Nevada Youth Legislature, which I chair and which is currently navigating the process of passing a bill this legislative session. It was interactions like these that I am grateful for and that showed me what it means to serve a community at the highest level and in the highest offices. Washington Week was an incredible experience that combined so many different factors to make it the unforgettable time it was.

An Expedition of Active Citizenship

Washington Week was the greatest expedition imaginable into active citizenship. From representing youth in our state government in the Nevada Youth Legislature to teaching a course on active citizenship for my senior capstone project, the topic of involving the youth community in the process of government is a passion of mine. Having the opportunity to explore the U.S. federal government and truly get an insider's perspective on the procedures of our system made for an exceptionally educational experience. From hearing the Senate Parliamentarian, Secretary of the Senate, and Senate Sergeant at Arms share anecdotes about their experiences in their positions to learning from seasoned public figures during our Senate Reception, my mind was opened to the world of governance and how it functions to ensure the American system of our representative democracy is secure. My fellow delegates and I not only had the chance to learn the history of the great active citizens of the past through touring our great monuments, memorials, and places of history, but we heard directly from the current leaders of our country, and we examined what led them to their active citizenship. As examples, we heard from Senator Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire who shared about her first experiences of advocacy when she was younger that led to her career in government, and from Senator Thom Tillis of North Carolina who shared how his journey began with advocacy to his city government about building a recreational zone in his community. These examples and others proved to me that we all have the capacity to become active citizens, regardless of background or where we start our journey. All it takes is to be focused on the community you represent in your advocacy. Experiences like these showed me how the USSYP has maintained a track record of producing some of the nation's excellent public servants. To share in this history of action and advocacy has inspired me to continue pursuing a career in public service.

Connecting with the Nation

The Washington Week program and experience in itself were amazing, but what I feel truly made the experience special was to share it with some of the best and brightest youth in the country. There is no other program like USSYP which selects civic-minded youth from every state and brings them all to one place to share in a journey of government and public service. It was apparent that no two delegates were alike, and each brought their own personal stories, experiences, and passions to the program. My roommate who was from Maryland, Mr. Charan Bala, and I built a genuine lifelong connection and friendship by getting to know one another. Some of our most impactful conversations occurred when we would spend time at the end of each day debriefing the day's activities and sharing our thoughts, reflections, and viewpoints. I learned so much about him as well as the state of Maryland, and I am thankful for the time we had to build our friendship, I know we plan to continue doing so after the program. I had the pleasure of engaging in many deep discussions with other delegates that covered all topics from policy to what makes our states unique. Some of the most impactful conversations I had were with one of my fellow delegates from Alaska. She and I discussed everything from our education and state traditions to how we can best care for our rural populations, which we learned we both had experiences advocating for. It was powerful to learn how a state so different from my own was struggling with the same issues we experience here, and it served as an example of how sharing solutions can inspire new positive change for different communities. Another key example of how having this group of individuals present enriched the Washington Week experience was during the numerous tours we took of locations such as George Washington's Mount Vernon, the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, and the U.S. Capitol. Whether it was sharing these experiences with

delegates who, much like myself, had never visited Washington before, or learning about the history and oddities of locations from delegates who live nearby and have visited many times, I was constantly learning from those around me. I am greatly appreciative to have the chance to build these memories and connections with my fellow delegates, and I am excited to see how we will continue sharing our successes as a class moving forward. To my fellow delegates, I am thankful to have the chance to meet them, share this time with them, learn from them, and build connections.

Military Mentorship

Having Lieutenant George Denove as my Military Mentor was a truly impactful, educational, enlightening, and inspirational experience, and I am grateful to him for spending his week with us and sharing his expertise. A significant part of my Washington Week experience was learning from anecdotes and responses he shared to questions about what his role was in the military and about what considerations our armed forces make daily to keep us safe. Lt. Denove is an incredibly knowledgeable individual in all matters of public service. Hearing about what led him to serve in the military and serve his country has inspired me to continue pursuing a career in public service and assisting my fellow citizens. On the note of Military Mentors, I am incredibly grateful to have had such a dedicated and wholesome group of young people in my Military Mentor group. We each came from very different states, political backgrounds, and experiences, but we truly built a bond that enriched the entirety of the week. Lt. Denove fortified what we were learning during the week as he challenged us to think deeply about the topics discussed in different sessions and he always made himself available to my fellow group members and I for inquiries about all topics. As a current military member, he shared key perspectives at each step of our learning journey on what considerations citizens may not always make when examining issues including foreign policy and beyond. Washington Week would not have been the same without Lt. Denove, and so I am grateful to him for his dedication to our group and the program. Lt. Denove and all of our Military Mentors were excellent examples of what public service and sacrifice look like. I enjoyed having the chance to speak with and hear from many of them, and having such a variety of mentors there from each branch of the military allowed for an exceptional learning opportunity. Some of the most powerful conversations I had were those with Military Mentors and asking questions to them to learn more about how our forces ensure our country is kept safe, and how we can build smart policy to keep it safe. I am incredibly appreciative of all of the military mentors who made our Washington Week journey possible through their chaperoning and educating efforts.

Reflecting on Memories

Representing the great state of Nevada during the 2025 USSYP Washington Week experience was the honor of a lifetime, and I am immensely grateful for the opportunity to fulfill this role. As a final word to share, I wish to extend my deepest appreciation to the Hearst Foundations, the USSYP leadership team, the USSYP program staff, the transportation services, and the food services, who made this logistical challenge of an experience possible and memorable. Through coordinating and executing this week of events, they have inspired a group of young people who are ready and able to take these lessons learned and apply them immediately. Through their work in service of the youth communities in every state and region, those who work with the program are just as much public servants as the great leaders we had the chance to interact with. I also wish to extend my deepest thanks to our Military Mentors, and especially my fellow delegates whose interactions made this experience so impactful. As I end this reflection, I think back on all of the positive adventures that I will cherish forever, but as Lieutenant Denove shared, USSYP doesn't just end on the final day of Washington Week. We have made connections that will last a lifetime. Thank you USSYP for the memories!