

Hannah Cross, OK – 2025

“What do you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” Monday morning, as I sat in the grand ballroom of the Mayflower Hotel, Mr. Brian Kamoie asked this very question. This question set the stage for a week full of insightful conversation, growth, and ultimately finding my calling.

When I found out that I had been accepted into the 2025 U.S. Senate Youth Program, I felt a range of emotions: shock, excitement, and awe. Looking back, I had no idea the impact Washington Week would have on my life. Quickly, I began connecting with fellow delegates from across the country through various social media platforms which made me more eager for the week ahead.

As I boarded the plane to Washington, D.C., I felt a mix of nerves and excitement. The nerves quickly diminished as soon as I walked into the Mayflower Hotel and saw the friendly faces of other delegates, Military Mentors, and USSYP staff. I eagerly awaited the days when I would be inside the Supreme Court, Department of State, NASA, Pentagon, and many other monumental places.

Listening to leaders of our country was a life-changing experience. Many times, I walked away from the speakers thinking, “they are humans too.” So often, especially in this political environment, it is easy to disassociate the humanity inside each person. Seeing firsthand the hearts of our leaders helped me to understand the importance of treating others with respect and love, even if you disagree.

Throughout the week, unity was a common theme. As I had conversations with the other delegates, I quickly realized that what unites us is greater than what divides us. Time and time again, our speakers would mention the importance of seeing different perspectives and uniting for the common good of our country and the people. As Senator Klobuchar said, “politics should be about improving people’s lives, not dividing them.”

As I look forward to college, I will never forget Secretary Rubio’s words, “if you can find something you are good at and love, then you’ve found your calling.” The U.S. Senate Youth Program has opened my eyes to my calling. I walked away from the program feeling secure in my career decisions to pursue law school and public service. Thank you to the Hearst Foundations, U.S. Senate, USSYP staff, Military Mentors, and fellow delegates for this incredible experience. Washington Week opened my eyes to the importance of serving something bigger than yourself. Sargeant Major Black said it best: “if not you, then who?” That statement couldn’t be more true.