

Ashley Murphy, RI – 2025

It is truly an understatement to say that the United States Youth Senate Program and Washington Week will forever be ingrained in my memory. Everything from the speakers to the other delegates, and even the food, was nothing if not impressive. I've been to DC before, but I quickly learned that going to DC and experiencing Washington Week are two entirely different affairs. Most people in the United States do not even have access to some of the people we met and the rooms we were in, leaving me awestruck most of the time I was there.

I was notably fortunate to be a part of Washington Week this specific year. A month into the active presidency of Donald Trump, it made the speakers we listened to, particularly those who work in government and public office, especially stimulating. The delegates and I were able to hear firsthand how the change in executive power had affected their positions and priorities within their work, which has been rapidly changing in the past months. Even in the month since Washington Week ended, I watch the people I've met on the news frequently as a result of the changing political atmosphere. And now, I watch with a new purpose, either recognizing the face or perhaps the place where they are speaking. It gives a new perspective and a newfound sense of involvement in the national government. Even though I may be a teenager sitting in my living room in Rhode Island, everything feels so much closer than before.

In addition, we discovered how the entirety of DC plays a role in our national government. In addition to strictly the public officials, their appointees, and the various departments that make up the national government, we listened to speakers from the media. It was fascinating to learn their roles in the government, even if not as direct. Media outlets and their portrayal of the government play a significant role in the work that gets done and the policies put in place. Harkening about its place in democracy was incredibly thought-provoking and provided a new perspective on the role of the media.

Another prominent aspect of the program was the influence of members of our military and other public servants to pursue a career in service. It was incredibly apparent that the people we met set out on a mission to pursue something greater than themselves and help people, a lesson they did not hesitate to share. Through Color Guard ceremonies, Military Mentors, and witnessing the Changing of the Guard at Arlington National Cemetery, Washington Week displayed the dedication to our country that is required in the functioning of our democracy. It emphasized that this "Great Experiment" is run by the benevolence and sense of pride from the people who swear an oath to protect our Constitution. In short, it was completely and utterly inspiring to witness the incredible people who give so much to our country and its citizens.

In closing, the United States Youth Senate Program was an unforgettable experience, one that I will forever be grateful to have. I loved every aspect of it and am already excited for the alumni events next year! I have an incredible amount of faith in the people that I have met and am even more excited to see the future of my fellow delegates. I can only imagine the incredible things we can do without experiences from Washington Week.