

Aingleah Ford, UT – 2025

Washington Week with the United States Senate Youth Program was a truly unforgettable and transformative experience. The speakers we had the opportunity to hear from, the things we were able to see, and the people we were able to meet, is what made it so unforgettable. Before Washington Week, I had been to Washington, D.C. one other time. Washington Week was truly unique, and like something I had never experienced before.

One of the most unique and memorable parts of the week were the amazing speakers we had the opportunity to hear from. The Senate Youth Program did an amazing job of getting bipartisan, educated, and inspiring speakers to incorporate into our schedule every day. Personally, the most memorable speeches were ones with raw information, and a feeling of honesty from the speaker. A few speakers that stood out were: Ambassador Ana Luisa Fajer, Senator Amy Klobuchar, and Senator Thom Tillis. All of these speakers did a great job of talking to us like the informed, civically active youth that we are.

Another great part about the speaker selection, was the emphasis on bipartisanship both in their remarks, and the selection by the Senate Youth Program itself. We were able to listen to Senators who were ranked some of the most bipartisan in the nation, and their remarks showed it. Listening to those amazing changemakers of our country discuss why it is realistic, and extremely important for the youth of our country to be bipartisan public service members gave me a new perspective, and hope for our country's future.

Washington Week was very special, because the United States Senate Youth Program is a well-established and accredited program. Because of that, we had the ability to be "behind the scenes" at many important places in D.C. Some locations that stand out for me are the Supreme Court and meeting with Justice Kavanaugh, the White House, the Pentagon, the Department of State, and the U.S. Institute of Peace. Having this unique insider view of Washington, D.C. further solidified my career goals, and excited me to be back in those rooms one day.

Of all the amazing things we did during our week in D.C., simply being with the other 103 delegates, Military Mentors, and USSYP staff would have to be the most impactful and memorable for me. Seeing the accomplishments, humbleness, and excitement from the other delegates was transformative to me personally. It was so exciting to be around other youth that really do want to make a positive change in our country, and that have similar career goals as me. It was so fun to see the eagerness from all of the delegates to connect and become friends with one another right off the bat. The Military Mentors' wisdom and life experiences brought a unique perspective to the Washington Week experience, and it was amazing to be able to talk to them. Lastly, the USSYP staff and directors were so inspiring, and great to talk to. Each and every one of them put so much thought, time and effort into creating a surreal experience for every single delegate, and I am so greatly appreciative to them.

I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to be a part of such an amazing week. A few overarching themes from the week were: the importance of bipartisanship, the importance of compromise, and that the delegates in that room are the future of public service in our country. Those three themes are and will forever be ingrained in my mind. In reflection, Washington Week is the most transformative and impactful week of my life thus far, and I plan to take every lesson learned from the week and apply it to my life.