

Louisa Pate, WV – 2025

Going into Washington week, I couldn't wait to get to meet everyone. I was also thrilled to get to hear from some of the most impactful people in our country. From the very first delegates I met in Dulles airport, I knew that Washington Week would be special.

All of Washington Week was memorable, but I will carry specific moments with me for the rest of my life. Walking into the Supreme Court was one of those. Standing in the place where our nation's biggest conflicts have been addressed was an awe-inspiring moment. The Changing of the Guard and the wreath laying ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery was also very moving. My family has many military veterans, and being able to think of their service in such a sacred place was very touching. Getting to go to the State Department and hearing from Secretary of State Marco Rubio was a highlight of the week. The anticipation for his arrival grew, and when he arrived, he held the whole room captive with his speech. Hearing thoughts on the nation from someone directly charged with charting its path was a very unique experience, but it was one that happened numerous times at USSYP. Every single speaker we had shaped how I viewed the rest of the week. Going back through my notebook, I can see just how many insights we were given. Hearing from the speakers in the "room where it happened" made the experience even more special. We weren't just hearing from Justice Kavanaugh; we were hearing it in the place where he works. Getting to see historical spots like the Capitol building and the Pentagon was very exciting. One of my favorite parts was the tour of the Capitol building, specifically because of my group's amazing tour guide, who took us through the building at a breakneck speed while also managing to tell specific stories of the meaning and history of this magnificent building. I also loved visiting the National Archives, and I was honored to be able to give closing remarks there.

More than the amazing speakers and sites, Washington Week was also special for the other delegates. I met so many amazing people who I can't wait to see change the world. What most interested me was how diverse people's goals were, but all were similar in the amount of passion they had for helping the world. Beyond the serious moments discussing the current world and our hopes of what it could look like, talking about music tastes and favorite foods was also very fun. Every dinner or lunch table was full of conversation on incredibly varied topics. Additionally, all of the military mentors were amazing people that I am so glad I got to meet. They were great inspirations for how to live a life of service, even if not working directly in government.

The last day was a whirlwind that never ended. We started out at Arlington National Cemetery, then went to the Pentagon. We then went back to the Mayflower and had our farewell dinner, with excellent speeches from Terry and Anjali. After that, we had our dance party. The night slowly became morning, as people began to leave for the airport. Each wave of departures ended with many goodbye hugs. Someone said as they were leaving that this was not good bye, but simply a "see you later." To all of the delegates of the class of 2025, I hope to see you again very soon.