

## Lucas Yang, MA – 2026

“Wow, what a week it has been.” That was the exact way that I started my farewell speech as I stood on the podium in the Mayflower Ballroom and looked towards the 64th delegation of the United States Senate Youth Program. Truth be told, I was in disbelief—in disbelief at how much had happened in such a short amount of time. It was hard to imagine that it had only been a few days prior when I first arrived in that same room, eager to meet the other delegates whom I am privileged to call my friends today.

Washington Week was everything that I imagined and more. Hearing firsthand from the leaders of our country, whether it was Justice Jackson or Secretary Hegseth, other prominent individuals who play just as crucial a role—like Dr. Katherine Scott and Mr. Charles Bolden—and inspiring speakers such as Mr. Brian Kamoie and Mr. Bill Doherty, I encountered countless perspectives that reminded me of the intellectual and cultural diversity of our country. Beyond their insights, I also came to see them as everyday Americans, providing me with a more personal and humanized view of our government.

Spending a week in our nation’s capital as our country’s 250th anniversary approached was truly special. Not only did we visit places sacred to the history of our nation, but we wholeheartedly embraced what the Founding Fathers’ great American experiment—representative government—was all about. We asked the tough questions, deliberated the difficult topics, and reflected on the unique role that each of us play in preserving our Union.

What I especially cherish from my week are the opportunities I had to speak on behalf of such a wonderful group. As I stood on the stage in NASA’s Headquarters delivering appreciation remarks for Senator Ed Markey, I could not help but think of the great milestones that the emblem behind me represented. Milestones that defied expectations and pushed boundaries, symbolizing what was possible when curiosity, ingenuity, and collaboration came together for the advancement of humanity. As I reminisced about our country’s past, I also kept in mind our country’s future—the best and brightest of which were sitting right before me. Alongside these exceptional young leaders who were just as passionate about public service and civic engagement, I practiced partaking in civil discourse, improved my acapella prowess, and mastered how to win the largest mafia game ever. Being elected by these very peers to deliver a keynote speech that reflected the collective feelings and experiences of all 105 of us is something I will treasure for the rest of my life.

Standing on that stage as our week drew to a close, I sought to capture everything from our time together. The emotions, the conversations, the late nights, the karaokes, the delectable desserts. Through it all, one thing I noticed was a shared mindset that we carried with us to all our endeavors during Washington Week. This mindset is perfectly embodied in Zootopia’s theme song “Try Everything” by Shakira—the song which I sang in the karaoke portion of my election speech and which some may view as the unofficial song of our delegation. Fittingly, I ended my farewell speech on this note, having witnessed firsthand the desire in every one of us to seek new experiences, meet new people, and explore places as diverse as Zootopia.

Washington Week happened because I was not afraid to try. Washington Week was as life-changing as it was because I set out to try. To *try everything*. Because of Washington Week, the words of a very smart bunny by the name of Judy Hopps resonate with me even more: “I implore you: Try. Try to make the world a better place. Look inside yourself and recognize that change starts with you. It starts with me. It starts with all of *us*.”

Try everything,  
Lucas Yang