

Jeremy Wong, MD – 2026

In Search of a More Perfect Union, I found that the answer does not lie in any textbook, any ideology, or any single person. Rather, I found that the answer can be found in my 104 fellow student delegates, 17 Military Mentors, and the many wonderful members of the U.S. Senate Youth Program (USSYP) staff. Being a part of the 64th USSYP Washington Week has been an incredible honor of a lifetime, and I can't possibly imagine a more amazing group of young leaders.

Born in Howard County, Maryland, I spent all my life growing up less than an hour away from our nation's capital. Whether it be the many family day trips, the litany of neighbors who work for the federal government, or the simple fact that as locals say, "our news is often just national news," much of my life has centered around D.C. Therefore, while I was ecstatic when I found out I had been nominated for a program in D.C., I admittedly was more so focused on who I'd meet and hear from rather than where I'd be going - the program did not disappoint.

Unlike most of my fellow delegates, I was fortunate enough to begin my Washington Week with a leisurely car ride, rather than having to deal with delays or catch connections. Yet, even though many of my peers arrived in a far more exhausted state than I, they were more than ready to dive into the week. Day one of Washington Week began by jumping into the deep end rather than feeling the water first. At lunch we cut straight in, discussing the nicheness of Alaskan state politics, complexities of American interventionism, and grounds for refusing an immoral order. Lt. Cmdr. Jordan Spector guided these conversations along, all while challenging us to think deeper about our opinions - something he'd do many times throughout the week and that I deeply appreciate.

The rest of the week was filled with deep and challenging conversation that genuinely encouraged open debate but also fair and respectable perspective taking. Of particular note was my numerous conversations with our nation's many wonderful public and civil servants. Whether it be with our Military Mentors, Mr. Brian Kamoie, or State Department employees, all of them reflected a strong sense of non-partisan service and dedication. Such an attitude provided a great deal of hope, demonstrating the dedication and sacrifices of those who actually make America happen.

While it would be impossible for me to encapsulate every amazing moment of the week, I do believe that some moments will go on to shape me. Hearing from Associate Justice Jackson was truly a delightful experience; her words were truly profound all while delivered in such an eloquent manner. As a fellow Speech and Debate kid, Associate Justice Jackson reminds us all of the power of finding one's voice and the words we use. Such ideas were reflected in Mr. Kamoie's words of encouragement at the beginning of the week. To be told that "you belong here" and to recognize the reality that it would be easy to shrink into a feeling of imposter syndrome meant a lot coming from someone as accomplished as Mr. Kamoie.

As I write this reflection, the ongoing Artemis II mission reminds me of the unifying power that space can have, but it also reminds me of the optimism and perseverance of Major General Charles Bolden. Getting to eat dinner underneath the planes and rockets at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum was in and of itself a treat but getting to hear so earnestly from MajGen. Bolden was the true highlight of Tuesday night's dinner. Throughout his remarks MajGen. Bolden approached the many issues that our nation faces from a lens of hopeful optimism, encouraging us as young leaders to take on the mantle of change. For someone who had gone to space he was far more interested in talking about earth - as he said, "I can't talk about space if we don't have a more perfect nation." My journal is filled with many other profound and quotable lines, but the one that sticks with me is that "you are no better than anyone else, but no worse."

Service has always meant something to me; as the son of two Taiwanese immigrants I've always been driven by the idea of giving back to a nation that has given us. Therefore, getting to visit the Pentagon was a deeply powerful experience. Growing up I was always told about how September 11th changed my father's career trajectory. An architect by trade, the attacks caused

him to shift projects from renovations for Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport to the rebuilding and renovation of the Pentagon - a change that would later thrust him into government service. Getting to visit the Pentagon for the first time and see the September 11th memorial came with a heavy weight, but also a great sense of appreciation for the impact and weight that a place can hold.

My Washington Week wouldn't be complete without the amazing people I met. To all my fellow delegates, I am eternally grateful for the many wonderful conversations and memories I got to make alongside you all. To my fellow Brussel Sprouts: Grant, Nial, Caleb, Ethan, Mason, Saagar, Saawan, I couldn't have asked to be a part of a more amazing group of young men; the support and love we showed each other are a reflection of the amazing people from this great and diverse nation. In a time where it feels easier to keep to yourself and your phone, getting to have deep and vulnerable conversations with some of my fellow delegates meant a lot.

Many alumni of the program speak of how Washington Week is life changing, and while I must admit I was initially a skeptic, I can now say that I fully agree with that statement. Major Daniel Sprouse, my Military Mentor, is the reason why. Our first night in D.C. showed me right away how deeply he cared for all of us - having taken the time to read our biographies Maj. Sprouse found a way to connect our hometowns and lives to some experience he had had in his life. All throughout the week Maj. Sprouse demonstrated great patience and grace, serving as a role model of what leadership looks like. Most of all, Maj. Sprouse consistently took the time to mentor each and every one of his delegates, even engaging in difficult but important conversations with us about our place in what can sometimes feel like a hopeless and lonely world.

As America approaches its 250th birthday, it is easy to remember, celebrate, and criticize the parts that we choose to. Yet, my Washington Week reminded me that America's story is so much more than just what one person, one group, or one ideology can see. Rather, America's story can only be seen when we stand together hand in hand. USSYP has been so deeply impactful on my life, the week showed me so much of this nation, its people, and its issues, but more than anything it showed me our hope for the future. I am eternally thankful to have been able to be a part of the 64th class of the United States Senate Youth Program and stand confident knowing that all 105 of us will go forward and live our "one wild and precious life" to its fullest.