

Ethan Cohen, NV – 2026

It was 3:30 in the morning, and I was sitting, sleepy and exhausted, in the Mayflower Hotel's Palm Court Ballroom. I had been awake since the morning prior, which had been the last day of programmed events for Washington Week. From driving all across Washington, D.C., to returning "back home" at the Mayflower Hotel for the farewell dinner, our last day was filled with so much that all I wanted to do was take a nap before departing for my early-morning flight. But when I was in that ballroom, surrounded by dozens of other delegates, all I could do was, surprisingly, keep myself awake. Energized knowing that this could be the *last time* all of 2026's delegates would be together, I defied my fatigue to spend time with the 104 friends I had made over the past week. We played games, told stories, bonded, and connected; by the time it was my turn to depart for my flight, it felt truly surreal that Washington Week had finally come to an end.

Washington Week: A Transformative Experience

Washington Week was by far the most amazing week of my life. I still remember the excitement I felt watching Washington, D.C., from above as I landed on the tarmac, exhilarated for the week ahead. I couldn't wait to begin.

The United States Senate Youth Program is not just a program – it's a way for our nation's most civically-minded young leaders to come together, learn from America's most senior government officials, and hear new perspectives we otherwise would never have been exposed to.

Whether it was hearing about Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson's life story; Secretary Pete Hegseth's and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Dan Caine's perspectives on what it means to lead our country's military; or the opinions of Senator Ed Markey and Senator Katie Britt, the USSYP's 2026 co-chairs, on the most relevant issues affecting Americans today, I walked away with an incredible and unique amount of insight, knowledge, and depth – things that could only be attained as a delegate with the United States Senate Youth Program.

104 New Lifelong Friends

Whether it was during our walk from the State Department to the National Mall, our enthusiastic bus rides (Coach 2 still is the best coach), or sitting down for breakfast, lunch, or dinner, the bonds I built with my fellow delegates were one of the best parts of Washington Week. Never before had I been surrounded by so many different people from literally every part of our country; I am grateful for the chance to have met 104 fantastic young leaders and individuals.

Appreciating Those Who Serve

Being surrounded by Military Mentors throughout Washington Week left an impact on me that I know will last the rest of my life. While I've always sincerely appreciated our service members, Washington Week allowed me to develop that appreciation into an even greater sense of gratitude and thanks for the men and women who risk their lives every day to protect us, our country, and the values we hold so dearly. Being in Major Daniel Sprouse's Military Mentor group – hearing about his journey from the United States Military Academy, to leading an entire group of soldiers, to serving as Special Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff – was a way for me to really understand the work our service members do. Plus, hearing about his deployment abroad highlighted the intense weight those who serve carry.

Culminating Washington Week with trips to Arlington National Cemetery and the Pentagon, paired with being around Military Mentors throughout the trip, deepened the connection and respect I have for the United States Armed Forces and every single person who has dedicated their lives to protecting our country.

A New Me

I am more than thankful to the Nevada Department of Education for selecting me for the greatest honor I could have imagined; the USSYP staff, who have put together a fantastic program and whose organizational talent was the key to Washington Week's success; all 17 Military Mentors, not only for dedicating their time to 105 delegates but also for their selfless service; and every member of the transportation, catering, and security teams who made the experience of Washington Week that much more meaningful. Finally, I owe a huge thank-you to the Hearst Foundations, for their tireless commitment to America's youth over the past 60+ years and for giving 105 delegates the special opportunity to engage with the highest level of American government.

The United States Senate Youth Program was truly the most transformative experience I could have asked for. I am sincerely grateful for the opportunity to have been selected to represent the great state of Nevada, and to have embarked upon this remarkable journey full of leadership, connection, friendship, and commitment to our country. I feel confident, inspired, and ready to serve, grateful to be walking away from Washington Week with an even greater sense of pride, purpose, and patriotism for our great nation.