

Rachel Skaar, MT - 2014

After I returned from Washington Week, my friends and family continually have asked me “How was it?” and every time I find myself unable to sum up the experience. “Incredible” and “amazing” just do not do the program justice. But there is one word that captures what was most meaningful to me: connections. The connections I made with the other delegates, the military mentors, and our speakers were what made a life-changing impact on me.

Before arriving at Washington Week, I was so nervous about meeting the other delegates and unsure of what they would be like. I didn’t need to worry because everyone I met was unique and interesting, kind and humble, and incredibly smart and successful. Each delegate has something different to bring to the table: an interesting experience to share, something unique about their state, or a different opinion on an issue. They wanted to discuss and debate issues, intelligently and respectfully—it was so refreshing. Each delegate I met was so genuine; many that I met I will surely stay in touch with for the rest of my life. The delegates I met at Washington Week gave me hope for our generation. Our generation is facing daunting issues like climate change and gridlock in Washington, and I know that we will be able to make a difference for our country.

The military mentors that accompanied us throughout Washington Week impacted me in ways that I was not expecting. During the introduction of our Military Mentors on our first night, the accomplishments of our Military Mentors deeply humbled me and renewed my respect for those who serve our country in the military. Throughout the week, the mentors were so supportive of the delegates and our goals. They were interested in our lives and wanted to share their advice with us. I had a lengthy conversation with one mentor that completely changed my outlook on the future and my prospective career. The advice I received from many of the mentors that week was invaluable.

I was absolutely awestruck at the multitude of speakers we had during Washington Week. The variety of backgrounds and careers that we were exposed to really made me feel as though we were getting an insider look at Washington D.C. Receiving advice from President Obama, Madame Christine Lagarde and Associate Justice Scalia left me with a brain full of new ideas and a notebook full of quotes. The opportunity to ask these individuals questions made the experience so personal. When Senator Jon Tester from my home, Montana, spoke to us, I felt so incredibly proud to be from Montana. After his presentation, the delegates only had good things to say about him. The fact that the Democratic Co-chair of the program was from my state this year was serendipitous and made my experience even better.

As President Obama said, “Don’t be cynical. Be optimistic because you are our country’s future.” I will never forget these words of wisdom, as I will never forget the impact the US Senate Youth program left on my life. I am positive that our generation is in good hands, with the USSYP Delegation leading us to a better world. Washington Week was an unforgettable experience and I know the connections I made will stay with me for the rest of my life.