

David H. Jiang, MN – 2015

“What did you do in Washington last week?” “How was Washington?” – These phrases were said to me countless times as I got back to school the Monday after USSYP. In reply, I have said, “It was fantastic!” or “Eye-opening” or “Awesome!” but after all the entire experience was way too rich to be boiled down to just a couple of words. It requires a detailed explanation.

The experience really started as soon as I got off the plane and walked past the security checkpoint. There were a couple of Military Mentors and a security staff holding a USSYP sign, and TV crews and a photographer. Right away, we knew this was going to be something really special.

Over the course of the week, we met a wide variety of fascinating people who are at the absolute top of their fields, who are truly passionate about the work they do. I would argue, however, that their most enduring and admired quality about our guests is their willingness to share their experiences with us. Their passion is shown through the excitement in their voice when they educate us about what they do. Their knowledge permeates through the conversations that we hold together. My favorite event during the week was the Senate reception in the Kennedy Caucus Room. First off, the location is overwhelming. Some of the most important hearings in the history of our Republic, showing the resiliency of our Democracy, from the McCarthy hearings to the Watergate hearings, were held in that room. Second, we got to meet our senators. Despite whatever the persona politicians have on CNN or Fox News, they are still human. I was truly surprised at how genuine each senator was, how much they cared about the future of our democracy, and how open they were to our questions. Despite their partisan bickering, and political differences, at the reception, the left talked with the right, and Democrats were eating cheese puffs with Republicans, which makes me believe that there still might hope in our government.

The locations were awesome, the speakers were awesome, but the delegates were the best. They represent the best and brightest America has to offer, and it gives me faith that someday, it will be my fellow delegates who are the CEOs of companies, senators and representatives, department secretaries, or even the president of the United States. The friendships that I formed at the 53<sup>rd</sup> annual USSYP Washington Week will last me a lifetime. It was simply an honor to be able to spend a week with 103 of America’s finest to learn more about our government.