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In a few years, when I look back on my experience during Washington Week, it will be just as relevant to who I am then as it is today. From the moment I saw the sign emblazoned with the USSYP logo at Dulles International Airport to the moment I told my last fellow delegate goodbye, it was an experience I will remember for the rest of my life.

Beyond the delicious food, the grandeur of the Mayflower Hotel, and the historical locales, the most substantial part of my experience was the people I was surrounded by: the 17 Military Mentors, the USSYP staff, the excellent speakers, and, of course, my fellow delegates. Some of the wisest and most meaningful quotes of the week came not from a scheduled speaker, but from my own Military Mentor. Having been a delegate himself, he was able to provide a unique perspective on how we could make the most of the week and use our experiences to be better public servants. From our security team to the program nurse, the USSYP staff were there to provide us with any help we needed.

Never before have I been around such an intelligent and accomplished group of students who cared so greatly about the issues we face as a nation. It is not very often I find an individual my age who is as interested in politics and government as I am, let alone a group of 103, and it was a refreshing change of pace to spend the week hearing from the many individualized ideas on how we can solve the problems we face as a nation. Throughout the week, I forged friendships with students from across the nation that will last for years to come.

A common theme throughout the week was how to be the best public servant you can be. One of the qualities that came up most often was a genuine want to help others. Senator Joe Manchin said it best when he said, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Beyond the genuine care one must have for the people they serve, they must also have sincere camaraderie towards those whose views differ from their own. "Political polarization" was a term that came up quite often throughout the week, and, from our many speakers, I learned that it is an obstacle that must be overcome so that we can be successful in finding solutions to our nation's problems.

The main result of my week in Washington, D.C. was that it solidified my want to spend my life in the service of others. One of the most profound moments for me personally was our trip to Arlington National Cemetery. To look out and see how so many had paid the ultimate sacrifice in preserving our country and its ideals, I became resolute in my decision to dedicate my life to serving my country and its people in any possible way, just as those many men and women had. Now, I cannot wait to see what many opportunities my life will bring as a public servant, and I owe this enthusiasm to the United States Senate Youth Program.