

Corbin Robinson, IL – 2016

“Hopefully, you’ll come out of this program wanting to serve,” were just a few of the words NASA Administrator Charles F. Bolden, Jr. spoke as he delivered an enlightening address to the 2016 Class of USSYP delegates. I was fortunate to have been a part of that class of delegates, a class of delegates that were blessed with a lineup of brilliant speakers and guests throughout Washington Week 2016. As I search for the words that define my time in D.C., I find few that deal it justice. However, I can say with certainty: I left D.C. wanting to serve.

The very moment I met my plane buddy, Missouri delegate, Meghana Bharadwaj, in the Saint Louis airport, was the first step of uniting with my USSYP family. For several months, I spent sleepless nights conversing with the geniuses that make up the 2016 USSYP class of delegates via social media platforms. I was pleased when I arrived to The Mayflower Hotel that my suspicions were confirmed, these delegates were the kind of individuals I wanted to surround myself with. I knew from the very first conversation I had, talk of Donald Trump versus the GOP establishment, that I was embarking on a journey that was going to be eye opening - and eye opening it was.

There is no doubt that every single person I encountered throughout Washington Week left an indelible impression on my life. The atmosphere from the very moment I woke up, to the end of the each day in D.C., was one of dreams, empowerment, and camaraderie. Each morning, my day began hearing the words of my roommate, “today is going to be a good day,” and a good day it was. While I could spend countless hours detailing the events that made Washington Week so sensational, in the interest of being succinct, I would like to recap a few exceptional moments.

Two guests in particular both made statements that haven’t left the back of my mind. Senator Cory Gardner, and Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, John Kirby, spoke with conviction, humor, and a contagious positivity. Since I learned of my selection as a delegate to the program, I was looking forward to hearing Senator Gardner’s address. Through his words, his dedication to service shined. Senator Gardner told us “you don’t need to act like you belong, because you do belong.” I remember walking out of the ballroom just after I shook his hand and spoke with him for a few moments, energized to make a difference, and to become, in his words, “not a passive observer, but an active participant,” in making a difference.

Assistant Secretary Kirby brought some candor to the podium as he addressed us ahead of a State Department press briefing. I appreciated learning what he does on a daily basis, and especially the frankness of his remark, “no spokesperson is worth their weight if they don’t have the courage to offer counsel to leadership.” Gaining a glimpse into the State Department, a place where important work often goes unnoticed (with good reason), was a pleasure. I will never forget the Assistant Secretary’s analogy of a pony as opportunity, and that we should “look for those ponies as they run by, and hop on when we need to.”

A recurring theme I believe you will find in all of the USSYP delegate’s reflection writings, is that Washington Week was simply inspiring. It is no simple task to recount the remarkable time I was able to spend in D.C.; I know in the future we will look back and live vicariously through the photographs that document Washington Week 2016. As I close out this essay, it is only appropriate that I show my gratitude to my fellow USSYP Class of 2016 delegates for their fellowship, to the military mentors for their wisdom and guidance, and to The Hearst Foundations for their investment in the future of our great nation.