

Kiley Marron, IL – 2016

For me, describing Washington Week is like trying to eliminate partisan politics from Congress: it's impossible. Friends and family alike have inquired about my experience — most after seeing our photo with President Obama posted online — and my answer remains “It was great.” I am fully aware that “great” only scratches the surface of my experience, but words to accurately capture Washington Week elude me. Washington Week is simply something that has to be experienced in order to truly grasp its significance.

Washington Week, on its surface, is primarily centered around speakers and other events. Mount Vernon, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial were just a few of the historical landmarks we visited, and each one left me with an impression of the magnitude of our nation's history. Our speakers represented a variety of professions, including senators like Mazie Hirono and Cory Gardner, Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and even the director of NASA. Each one imparted his or her own advice and wisdom upon the USSYP Class of 2016, and in doing so represented the various ways that each of us may serve our nation in the future.

I believe that underneath its surface, Washington Week is about bringing together 104 incredible student delegates. Each delegate brought with him or her a unique background and worldview, and having the ability to interact with these individuals is why Washington Week was so impactful. In one week alone I met individuals who lived across the country, who came from small towns and big cities, but were all united by a common interest in government and public service. To be completely honest, I am still in awe of my fellow delegates and their accomplishments. But I am wholeheartedly grateful for the time we were able to spend together during Washington Week.

The diversity of the USSYP Class of 2016 was best demonstrated through the time we spent together during meals and in between events and speaking engagements. During this time, I participated in discussions with fellow delegates about religion, voter ID laws, gun violence, and yes, the 2016 presidential election, and each of these experiences was enriching to the point where I saw my own opinions and beliefs begin to shift. As someone who hails from a big city that is also very liberal, I found the discussions with my fellow delegates to be remarkable. Just simply interacting with these individuals impressed upon me the diversity of our nation and the importance of reaching across the aisle politically and geographically in order to develop a more well-rounded perspective.

The delegates to the United States Senate Youth Program are inherently very passionate and driven individuals. I firmly believe that each of us will have a significant impact on our communities or the nation at large in the coming years. In fact, just knowing that individuals like my fellow delegates exist gives me profound confidence in the future of the United States. One of the prevailing themes of our week in Washington, D.C. revolved around the challenges our generation will face, such as the impending threat of climate change. While such obstacles appear daunting today, the USSYP Class of 2016 appears poised to offer solutions for tomorrow. In just one week, I observed how my fellow delegates approached divisive political issues with compromise and respect, and such traits are undoubtedly necessary to solve some of the nation's (and the world's) most pressing issues. As I look toward the future, I am unlikely to forget the unique perspectives of my fellow delegates; I hope that their views will continue to impact my own. Washington Week will remain a pivotal week in my memory, and I cannot express enough gratitude to The Hearst Foundations and the United States Senate for this experience. While I regretfully acknowledge that the USSYP Class of 2016 may never have the opportunity to spend time together again — all 104 of us — I carry with me the knowledge that we are the future of our nation, and that future gets brighter with each passing day.