

Manaal Ali, SD – 2016

I came to Washington Week with just a suitcase but I left with incredible knowledge, wisdom, experience, and 103 best friends. I always get heart palpitations when someone asks me about USSYP because there's so many things I could tell them — things like all the incredible speakers we had. Or the amazing monuments we saw. Or the laughs and tears we shared, etc. If I was forced to describe USSYP in just one sentence, however, I would say this: we came as strangers, but left as best friends.

The morning I was set to arrive in Washington D.C., I was running late. Very late. I arrived at the airport when my plane was boarding, had a bag that was one pound overweight, and faced a security checkpoint line that was two miles long. Right when I was ready to give up and just wait for a later flight, the TSA pre-check line opened and I was ushered in. By the time I boarded the plane, everyone was seated and waiting for me. I started with this story because I feel as though it was a sign. Yes, I was running late. Yes, I didn't correctly weigh my bags (always a struggle), but I still managed to make it to D.C. on time. There was a reason I had to get on that plane, and that reason, as I would find out later, would be life-changing. I will always be grateful to the United States Senate Youth Program for giving me this opportunity. I can't wait to see what the future has in store for me and the rest of my USSYP family.