

Alesha Guenther, WI – 2016

It's so hard to put into words an experience that changed your life. On March 5th of 2016 I got on a plane to come to Washington, D.C. and when I returned home my life was forever changed. While in Washington, we met with some of the highest officials in each branch of government, visited some of the most historic places in our nation's capital, and truly met some of the nation's best and brightest. My week in Washington, D.C. taught me so much about life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

My favorite speaker of the week was Senator Cory Gardner of Colorado. Hearing him speak about how USSYP started his career in politics was so inspiring, and his words of encouragement were very meaningful. I also learned a lot of what it means to be a public servant. The people that we met in all parts of politics had something different to say about Washington Week. Supreme Court Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg said that she and her colleagues realized that they are serving an institution more important than themselves. Hearing all of the public servants that we met talk about their work and their country was so moving. While many complain about the public officials in Washington, I don't think that the general public realizes that these people really do care about our country and everyone in it.

To be completely honest, leaving Washington was one of the hardest things I've done. It was all I could do to put one foot in front of the other to get on my plane. It was so hard to leave because of the experiences that I had. I got to step foot inside the highest court in the nation. I got to meet with my senators. I got to walk through the halls of the White House. I got to eat in the State Dining room at the State Department. But, most importantly, I got to meet with some of the nation's best and brightest. The relationships that I had the opportunity to forge in Washington with the nation's best and brightest was truly the most meaningful experience. These people are all so inspiring. Each and every one of them has something so special about them that they brought to our class of delegates. They all have passions for a variety of career areas, but all of them have a passion for our country. This gives me so much hope for our nation's future to know that this group of people, who cares so much for our country, will be leading us in the future.

I would like to thank The Hearst Foundations for funding this wonderful opportunity. Washington Week truly was such a privilege to be a part of. Also, with the gift of funding my education, I hope to make a lasting difference in the world with what I learn during college, and give back to our country. I would also like to thank the United States Senate for this honor, and the state of Wisconsin for allowing me this opportunity. A huge thank you goes out to Senator Johnson and Senator Baldwin for personally meeting with the lovely Elyssa Vondra and me. I would like to thank the military mentors that took their time to mentor us through Washington Week. All of their support was very meaningful and truly added to the week. I would also like to thank the other 103 delegates for making Washington Week truly the best week of life. Finally, I would like to thank my country. Growing up in the United States has truly been one of the greatest blessings in my life. I am so thankful for those who have served their governments, communities, and their people to make this nation great.