

Bianca Eagan, AK – 2018

Dear Hearst Foundations,

The United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) is an unparalleled immersion into national government as we begin lives of civic engagement, and I will forever be grateful for this opportunity. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

Dear Military Mentors,

After heartfelt discussions at each meal, my perspective on the military is broadened. I've uttered the phrase in the past, but it resonates now, so thank you for your service. Thank you also for ensuring that I didn't make a complete fool of myself by using my salad fork for dessert.

Dear Caterers,

One might think that preparing food as impressive as this program's agenda is a hopeless feat, but you have attained it!

Dear Speakers,

When I first received the speaker list, I was delighted to have the opportunity to hear so many political celebrities. However, meeting each of you reminded me that even the most powerful leaders are still human, and the most important words are those delivered from your hearts. You donated your time, your wisdom, and your knowledge so that we are all able to thrive as public servants in the future. This is not what I expected, but in speaking to us you have continued to show your commitment to America's future. We will never achieve perfection, but after this experience my trust is restored that we will never, ever give up.

Dear Rayne, Lynn, and all other staff,

You work incredibly hard to ensure that our week is beyond perfect, and you succeed. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Dear Codelegates,

The future is in our hands, and I am highly optimistic. You are undoubtedly the 103 most driven and kind peers I have ever had the honor to befriend. The pain that I feel because I missed hearing both Senator Warren and Senator Sanders speak on the floor by a fateful seven minutes is insignificant in comparison to the excitement in your voices upon informing me that I had, in fact, missed the event. The hush that fell over the room as Secretary Mattis entered the room -- an indication of how much you care about our nation and its safety-- couldn't have been feigned even by professionals. The passion you possess will not be suppressed, nor should it. You are able to hold eloquent, passionate, and respectful conversation about everything from the merits of ranch dressing to the merits of Steve Cox's coordinated attire to the merits of the DeVos' voucher program and possible solutions to the opioid crisis. This something that our current leaders struggle with, and I am inspired by the bonds that I formed with many of you in a single week. Thank you for encouraging me to continue to strive for progress regardless of setbacks. Thank you for exemplifying that success does not have to come at the price of humanity. Thank you for all the wonderful memories, and thank you in advance for your lifelong friendship.

Dear Jakub and Erin,

Over the course of Washington Week, I was so preoccupied with the experience that I did not allot the proper amount of attention to reflection. You have immortalized the moments that my brain alone could not, and for that I am incredibly appreciative.

Dear Future Delegates,

How many times have you been told that an experience will change your life? A lot, I'm sure, but I promise that this time, it's true. Upon arrival, you may feel out of your league; among the peers you meet, the speakers you question, and the buildings you enter. Fear not! Every second of Washington Week is an

invaluable learning experience, and every aspect of it (including you!) has something wonderful to offer. I am now able to confidently describe what the current leader of the free world smells like. Based upon an on-the-spot headlining campaign principle, my senator said she'd vote for me. John Lewis himself has reminded me to do what I can "to save this little piece of real estate we call America." These moments stick out in my mind, but I am confident that if I asked my codelegates, each one would give a unique response; as will you. Fortunately, it's next to impossible to choose a highlight because every moment is memorable. Equally important to gaining wisdom from speakers, however, is engaging with your peers. I have said this before, but I will say it again: USSYP delegates are exceptional. Enjoy every debate, cherish every laugh, and remember that if you're as driven as most of us are, goodbye is only temporary; you might be leading the country together in the future! I don't think that this has truly hit me yet, but the United States Senate Youth Program is life changing in more ways than I can count, but don't take my word for it. Instead, I encourage you to embrace this program and your future. Leap fearlessly from unknown heights and into unknown waters. Trust that democracy will catch you.

With love,
Bianca Eagan