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No matter how many times I reread my notes and rack my brain for every last memory in an attempt to relive the incredible experience that is Washington Week, I know that I will never be able to fully encapsulate all that the week was and do it its full and deserved justice. When I first learned of the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP), I fell in love with every last detail of it and a fire was lit within me to earn a delegate position the following year. While I had this intense passion to obtain the spot, a part of me doubted my ability to obtain this prestigious honor, but my passion outweighed my fear, and I dug deep and trusted in my abilities and hard work that had gotten me to the point that I am at. This program, through the application process and week itself, brought out my innermost fighting spirit and taught me how to channel it to become all that I one day hope to be. Being surrounded by my brightest peers, poured into by indescribably wise Military Mentors, and interacting with and hearing from our country's foremost leaders redefined my view of public service, myself, and just how those two fit together.

As an aspiring attorney, the meeting with Justice Gorsuch in the Supreme Court chamber was my wildest dream come true and his words, like all of our other incredible speakers, stuck with me. A particular idea that he was passionate about was the notion that judges should be forgotten, that they are not serving to gain recognition or glory, but to serve their country through the interpretation of the Constitution. This spoke to me in a more general sense, as occupying a career in public service, or any field really, should not be about gaining fame and glory, but doing what is best for those your actions will impact and remaining true to your character and the purpose of the job. Justice Gorsuch exhibited a pure intent and heart and that is my aspiration as a public servant one day, to always remember that it is not about me and if my name never hits the headlines, that is perfectly okay as that is not my goal or intention in occupying a role in public service.

One unexpected takeaway from the week is the close bonds formed with the other delegates. The inspired and poured into me more than I ever anticipated, whether it be during silly games and story time on the mezzanine or through insightful debate over breakfast (I cannot mention the food and not say this, it is not overhyped or exaggerated, this food is out of this world incredible and there was a very real concern that we would be returning with the 'USSYP 15' (lbs gained)). They challenged my preconceived notions and beliefs, causing me to dig deep and analyze what it is that I believe, and they shared perspectives that I had never before encountered. They also pointed out my 'southern accent' (which I previously would have fervently denied) and frequent use of 'bless your heart,' which I had to explain to some of my northern and midwestern delegates has two very distinct meanings - by the end of the week, I was using midwestern slang and they were finally getting the hang of blessing each other's hearts. This difference in language and dialect illuminated to me just how important it is that we branch out of our bubbles and interact with those entirely different from us in culture, belief, and perspective as that is how we know what we truly believe. If 104 delegates can vary that much simply in accent and dialect, it is astounding how much we vary in viewpoint, and that is a really beautiful thing. I am so thankful to have made a second family in these delegates and am honored to sit among them in the USSYP class of 2018, because I know they will each go on to do the most amazing things and we will all be there to cheer each other on.

"Hey Georgia!", a phrase I heard many times over the course of the week, and one of the coolest moments when I realized what was actually being said in that short phrase. For the duration of the week, Aaron and I were Georgia, we were specifically chosen to represent our state and its name in a room full of representatives from their respective states. This idea gave the delegate position a new weight as I realized with an even greater conviction the gravity of our selection and attendance that week. My identity that week was grounded in my state's identity and I felt a tremendous honor at this realization.

One of the most influential and life-altering experiences was having such intimate interaction with members of our incredible military. I tried my best to get to know as many Military Mentors as possible and the more I would get to know these individuals, the more I saw just how extraordinary they are. My family has always been incredibly supportive of the service, with many relatives serving and my own brother in JROTC, but my perspective of the military was centered in the combat aspect. When I was younger, I had entertained the notion of wanting to pursue a legal job in the Navy, and beyond that working for a government agency or department, but it all felt like more of a dream than a reality that I could obtain. The mentors did not shy away from sharing every step along their journey, sharing with us just how feasible even our wildest dreams are, demonstrating to us through their tenacity and persistence in their own lives, that our dreams can never be too big as long as we have the passion and drive to back them up. I walked into Washington Week with a desire to

go into law in a general sense and walked out with a broadened horizon of opportunities that I can fearlessly pursue, whether that be private practice, in the Navy, or in Washington. The mentors reinvigorated us in the pursuit and conjuring up of our wildest hope and ambitions, and their passion to see us succeed and reach these goals was glaringly evident. I know that these mentors will be a part of my life from here going forward and serve as lifelong sources of mentorship and advice, and I am so thankful to USSYP for blessing all 104 of us with the opportunity to gain and form those relationships.

They said, Washington Week would be life changing, but while that is very true, USSYP didn't just change my life, it changed me. This program, broadened the scope of my dreams and ambitions and shifted my mindset from "what can I do with my future?" to "what can't I do with my future?" and challenged how I had previously viewed myself and my goals. When I came home, I was met with a million questions all dying to know what it was like, and I never could quite find the words. Washington Week is like a well-known hidden secret in this way, many know of it, but you can never fully know it at its core unless you experience it. The United States Senate Youth Program blessed me with a lifetime's worth of stories, 103 incredible friends who I know will change the world in amazing ways, wonderful mentors that I know will pour into me for the rest of my life, and a reinvigorated passion that is bent on pursuing and achieving every last goal that I set, knowing that it can never be too big or too ambitious. Washington Week taught me the strength of our inner power, and it is this power that will carry each of us on to shake up this world for the better and leave everything and everyone we touch better than we found it. I know that's what Washington Week did to me, and for that I will be forever thankful.