

Dashiell Chin, MA – 2018

A few days before Washington Week, a former Massachusetts delegate emailed me saying that I was about to eat “the greatest meals you have ever consumed in your life.”

I can now confirm his claim to be true.

Whenever someone asks me to describe my time with USSYP, I have only ever been able to use one word: surreal. And really, for all intents and purposes, it is the only the word that really works. Without exaggeration, the Hearst Foundations provided me with an experience of a lifetime. From the moment I stepped on the plane from Boston to Dulles airport, the first time I had been on a plane in ten years, I knew that I was getting an experience that many adults would love to have. Besides the grandeur of The Mayflower Hotel and the privilege of private transport and security, however, the greatest aspect of Washington Week was the people. Mixed with 103 other delegates from across the country, I learned more about United States society than I could ever understand from reading the news or a textbook. I had the opportunity to make great friends and understand perspectives that I am never exposed to at home. As we moved from speaker to speaker, the military mentors enhanced our experience not only as chaperones, but also as teachers and friends. Undoubtedly, I will never forget Major Barnes’s professionalism, kindness, and hilarious dry sense of humor.

On our visit to the Supreme Court, Associate Justice Neil Gorsuch humorously remarked, “Things are terrible for you all. I don’t deny that. But things have always been terrible.” While his observation garnered laughs in the moment, the meaning of the statement has stuck with me. While the history of America is that of struggle, change has always been achieved by passionate individuals who found their voice and remained strong in their convictions. Continually caught in the crossfire of political polarization and partisan tension, we live in circumstances where it is easy to be cynical and pessimistic. However, in the face of societal tensions and perceived discouragement, we must use our frustrations and translate them into actions. Perhaps no person embodies this philosophy better than Congressman John Lewis, who we were fortunate to hear at a luncheon in the Mayflower Hotel. Experiencing a life of oppression and injustice, Congressman Lewis transformed his pain into a productive life of service and advocacy. In his concise, yet powerful, speech, Congressman Lewis inspired us with his willingness to defend human rights at the risk of his own safety. While no words can do justice to the significance of Congressman Lewis’s actions, we honor his efforts by continuing that same commitment to public service in our own lives.

While we delegates, as youths, are the future of this country, it has been important for me to recognize that the future is not us alone. Though I have had the honor to be humbled by my amazing fellow delegates, currently, there are almost a million Americans our age with their futures endangered by the Trump administration. We are no more brilliant or American than the individuals under the DACA program, and undoubtedly, these young people are our country’s future too. However, the Hearst Foundations has put us in a position of privilege where, with our exposure to the government, we are equipped to represent those without such opportunities. Above all, my unforgettable experience with Washington Week has affirmed my confidence in our ability and commitment to work compassionately for those who need compassion most.