

Dawson Frost, NV -- 2018

Washington Week felt like a dream. Throughout the week I thought that if I pinched myself I would wake up. Each and every moment was special, surreal and absolutely vital in shaping my experience. When I returned home and “woke up” I went through a post-USSYP depression as I wondered what in my life could possibly beat such an awesome experience. But in reflection I have come to realize the best things from Washington Week are what we take home with us; the friendships, the memories, the insights, and most importantly the drive to make a positive impact in our communities.

Coming from a small town in the middle of the desert can make the people who run our government feel distant and imaginary. Very rarely do opportunities to meet senators, congressmen, Supreme Court justices, and Cabinet secretaries arise. Washington Week provided a rare chance to see these esteemed officials as human beings rather than TV figureheads. Throughout the week I was amazed by their acumen, humor, and compassion. I will never forget the moment when Congressman John Lewis walked into the State Ballroom at the Mayflower Hotel and all 104 of us fell into an awestruck silence before thunderous applause erupted. Nor will I forget Senator Amy Klobuchar’s witty jokes, Senator King’s nine pillars to success, or the way Senator Scott captivated the room with his animated and energetic speech. But most importantly, I understood that nearly every person we encountered was doing what they believed was best for the country. Whether or not I agreed with a person politically, I found a respect for their service and sacrifice.

In every speech, the need for civility and respect in politics were discussed. Supreme Court Justice Gorsuch said, “Just because you disagree, does not mean you have to be disagreeable.” This statement epitomizes the sentiment of Washington Week. As a big diverse country, it is absolutely integral to our republic that those who govern our country understand the values of compromise and bipartisanship. With delegates hailing from every corner our nation, USSYP 2018 was not short on ideological diversity. The conversations I had with fellow delegates and Military Mentors were just as important if not more important than the speeches from some of our nation’s most well-known leaders. Late night conversations or those on the bus between events often contained some of the best revelations about the week. In my fellow delegates, I witnessed a sharp intellect and unquenchable passion for utilizing government as a tool to improve the lives of others. Positions that I had previously disagreed with were articulated so effectively that I changed my mind.

The “aha” moment of the week came in a group discussion with all 104 of us after listening to Congressman John Lewis. We deliberated about the upcoming meeting with the president. Needless to say, the room was raw with emotion as we conferred about whether or not pins of resistance should be worn. Delegate after delegate powerfully put forward their reasons for wanting to wear a pin. As somebody who disagrees with the president, but has not been affected negatively by his policies, it was eye-opening to see the struggles of my fellow delegates. Their strength and indefatigable courage in the face of coming adversity was awe-inspiring. During this session, I questioned how I could possibly find myself in the same room as these remarkable individuals. Upon reflection, it is easy to fall into a bubble where ideological diversity is scarce and become blind to the problems of another. After this session, I will never make such a mistake again. Although the noise of life can often deafen us to others it is imperative that we make time to stop and listen to each other.

The United States Senate Program has left a lasting impression on me. I cannot thank those who made this week possible enough. This program has inspired me to find a way to serve our nation in whatever capacity I can. From it, I take with me a renewed sense of optimism, hope and patriotism.