

Pranit Nanda, NV – 2018

When I was given a letter notifying me of my selection as a delegate for the United States Senate Youth Program, I reread it several times and wondered about the experiences I would have at the program. Three months later, when I arrived in Washington, D.C., my expectations for the program were quickly exceeded. My experience was shaped not only by the inspiring speakers I heard from each day, but also by the conversations I had with a group of delegates who represented a diverse set of backgrounds and shared my strong passion for public service. After having so many unique opportunities and experiences in the span of a single week, looking back on the program feels surreal.

My Washington Week experience showed me that public service can come in many forms. I had the chance to meet many individuals who demonstrated the breadth of public service and the importance of giving back to one's community, state, and country. Often, it can be hard to see prominent members of government as real people, but the public figures I met and heard from during Washington Week countered this notion by sharing their thoughts and advice in a genuine manner. The conversations I had with both of Nevada's senators helped me see their passion for serving our state and nation and gave me greater motivation to do so in the future. When I spoke to Senator Dean Heller about pursuing a career in public service, he gave me a valuable piece of advice. He told me that by becoming an expert in any field, not necessarily politics or law, I can find a relevant position in the public sector and have an impact in government.

Out of the many inspiring speakers I heard from during Washington Week, two stood out to me the most. One was Justice Neil Gorsuch, who thoughtfully answered several questions from delegates and helped me understand the role of the Supreme Court in the democratic process. I admired Justice Gorsuch's genuineness and his willingness to spend time discussing his ideas and thoughts on public service. I was pleased to see that the rest of the speakers shared these characteristics, as well. The other particularly memorable speaker was Congressman John Lewis. His story showed me the passion he had for public service and the strong motivation he had to defend his beliefs. I felt very fortunate to hear from a prominent civil rights leader who played a major role in promoting equality in the United States. I took notes on almost all the speeches I heard during Washington Week, but Congressman Lewis's speech was the exception. I was so captivated by his story that I was unable to instantaneously translate his powerful message into writing.

Washington Week gave me many memorable moments with some of the most impactful individuals in the federal government at the most iconic locations in our nation's capital. I saw the president, vice president, and first lady at the White House, had dinner in the same room as the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, and sat at the same table as the secretary of the Treasury. I never expected that I would have memories like these before I even finished high school, and I am extremely grateful for the Hearst Foundations' efforts toward making these memories possible.