

Tate Stevenson, TN – 2018

There are not enough words in the dictionary nor emotions in the human spirit to fully convey the true measure of the positive impact that the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) had on my life. Through Washington Week, I grew stronger as a person, was exposed to countless different perspectives and ideals, and met some of our country's and world's most influential leaders.

Several facets of the program allow Washington Week to perform and be the world-class leadership and government program that it is, and I would like to highlight a few of them. For those considering applying to this program, I hope my experiences expressed here will prove to you that there is no better program offered to high school students, and I implore you to apply as well. To my fellow delegates, I strive to share my candid and amazing experiences that we were able to embrace together, and I know that you all had similar yet equally unique and incredible experiences. To my now fellow USSYP alumni, I desire to invoke in your memories from your experience that serve to connect us, each knowing of the incredible breadth, organization, and power of Washington Week.

Washington Week allows delegates incredible access to our government's most elite officials, many of whom we were able to participate in question and answer sessions with after hearing them speak. These were leaders such as the Senate historian, Justice Gorsuch, Senator King, Senator Scott, the director of National Intelligence, and even President Trump.

My favorite speaker was Senator Angus King from Maine, a Co-Chair for the 56th annual Washington Week. He spoke to us at dinner in the rotunda of the National Archives, and hearing him speak with the Constitution behind him made the very essence of the experience almost palpable. He gave us ten very clear points. My favorites were his last two.

Number Nine: "You don't have to be in politics to make a difference." He went on to inspire us to make differences in our everyday life that will eventually make a sizeable impact.

Number Ten: "Character is above everything else." After making this statement, he further quoted Alan Simpson, a former Senator from Wyoming, saying, "If you have character, nothing else matters. If you don't have character, nothing else matters."

My fellow delegates from all across the nation – and even world – added a completely new dimension to the program. From the late nights, bus rides, and breakfast conversations came interesting debate and commentary on the speakers and current affairs that were both challenging and rewarding. My fellow delegates are really the ones who make the program as fulfilling and memorable as it is.

Having had the privilege to complete this one-of-a-kind program, I am now more invigorated than ever to achieve my political and law aspirations. More than that, though, I know that my generation really does have the power to change the world because my fellow delegates and I can do it together.

On the last day of the program, as we were all signing each other's moleskins, my Military Mentor, Captain Iida, wrote the following in my journal, and I would like to share it with you as I feel that it perfectly encapsulates my emotions and experience through Washington Week: "Waste no time arguing what a good man should be. Be one. Semper Fidelis."