

Sadie Sands, AK – 2019

Every time my thoughts stray back to the week I spent in Washington, D.C. as a United States Senate Youth Program delegate, I am caught in a state of wonder and humility. Despite how overused and cliché the phrase has become, my participation in this program was truly a “once in a lifetime opportunity.” Looking back, it is nearly impossible to choose a specific moment or experience that impacted me more than any other. Rather, each sight, speaker, and moment, seems to connect and build on each other to turn the entire experience into a dazzling crescendo that will echo throughout my lifetime inspiring and impressing upon me the value and uniqueness of our government.

From the moment I wheeled my overstuffed suitcase into The Mayflower Hotel, I was struck with the grandeur and historical significance of the building that was to be my home away from home. Those feelings continued at every location we stopped at, mixing with other emotions: the sobriety and fierce pride the memorials instilled, the awe and beauty of the library of Congress and State Department, and even the power and intimidation of the Supreme Court Room. Looks of course are not everything, but the aesthetic and visuals of the capital city instill a message and a promise: work here and live among the grandness and the history, work here and become grand and a part of history.

There was far more to Washington Week than the pieces of history we saw. In fact, the primary attraction during Washington Week were the speakers. From the passionate and inspiring words about American ideals from Jack Warren on our first day, to the somehow both casual and extremely humbling Q&A session with Chief Justice Roberts, each speaker was unique, but undeniably knowledgeable and informative. The opportunity to see in person and have an active dialogue with the speakers made me feel connected to the government in a way I never have before. Suddenly these people were more than just pixels on a screen or a voice coming through a speaker. These were real people who could answer our questions. Listening to their stories, I realized that it was not impossible for me to be in their shoes someday. Every speaker we had was interesting and eloquent; choosing one that stood out among all the others is nearly impossible. My favorite speaker was Susan M. Gordon, the Principal Deputy Director of National Intelligence simply because we share the same favorite movie: The Princess Bride.

As amazing as the speakers were, the people who I admired and who inspired me the most were my fellow delegates. What started as an endless line of hellos and introductions ended with us all together, arms around each other as we swayed and sung the words “Lean on Me.” And lean on them I have. If not in the physical sense, then at least in the intellectual one. The discussions we had at meal times, on busses, or even while waiting out in the hall for breakfast, made an impact on me then and continue to now. Every delegate I had a chance to talk to was passionate and accomplished. If they had been middle aged adults I would have admired them, but knowing they were my age and that their aspirations were to reach even higher, left me in awe. Before Washington Week I was anxious about the problems my generation would have to face. But now, after spending a week with the future leaders of our country, I am excited and confident that together we can work together to improve our country and the world.

While my knowledge of our government has drastically improved since my participation in this program, that seems like more of a side effect. The true gift of this experience was the way it allowed me to interact with the dedicated people who have pledged their life to our country’s past, present, and future. I want to be among those people. I want to give back to the country and people who have honored and invested in me. With the connections and confidence, I gained as a United States Senate Youth Program Delegate this is no longer a far-off goal. It is a guarantee.