

Zane Yamamoto, HI – 2019

Initially, I thought the all-star lineup of the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) was going to be the most impressive part of my Washington Week experience. How many people can say that they received a lecture from the chief justice of the Supreme Court? And while Justice Robert's talk was intriguing, I can definitively say that my 103 fellow delegates were the highlight of my Washington Week.

I thought I was passionate about politics, but I was blown away by the breadth and depth of perspective and knowledge possessed by my fellow delegates. It was singular experience. I was surrounded by people who were deeply interested in big questions about political philosophy and public policy, who opened my eyes to new perspectives and solutions. I wish I could replicate that infectious spirit back here in Hawai'i. Even though I was only getting six hours of sleep, being able to sit down at breakfast and discuss everything from a \$15 minimum wage to the Green New Deal gave me the energy to carry on — so did the coffee served at every meal. Yes, your fellow delegates will have impressive resumes. They will be officers in student government, presidents of youth associations, and talented thinkers, speakers, and debaters. Don't let this intimidate you. You deserve to be there and you must make full use of your time: seven days will fly by a lot faster than you think. Ask questions. Seek answers. And never be afraid to disagree.

You may be tempted to stay in your room and try to catch up on the classwork you're missing. Or, you may be tempted to fall asleep early after a day packed chock full of activities. Resist both these temptations. Go down to the mezzanine and the Grand Ballroom to mingle with your co-delegates. Learn about their lives, their states, and their communities. Play a couple hands of blackjack or see who can play the grand piano in the back corner of the ballroom.

Don't forget to stay connected with the friends you make at USSYP. It may not seem like a week is enough time to get to know someone, but believe me, you will meet people, befriend them, and tearfully bid them goodbye all in the span of seven days. But just because Washington Week has ended doesn't mean your friends will too. Just this past week, one of the DoDEA delegates visited Hawai'i for spring break and I got the chance to show her around the island. Even though USSYP had been just a month prior, it was like meeting a long-lost friend. I guarantee you that the Farewell Dinner on Friday will be one of the most bittersweet moments of your lives, and that is a testament to incredible caliber of people who attend USSYP. Keep an open mind, have fun, and remember that USSYP is a nut-free zone.

Aloha,
Zane Yamamoto