

## **Tyler J. Swanson, IL – 2019**

Coming from a small town in rural Illinois, I never would have dreamed that I would one day meet the leaders of our nation, much less spend a week in Washington, D.C. being treated like a celebrity. All of this changed the day that I received a packet in the mail telling me I was accepted to the United States Senate Youth Program. Washington Week was a whirlwind for me full of new experiences, great friends, and life altering lessons from some of the most respected officials in the United States of America.

Of all the speeches I heard throughout the week, the one that stuck with me the most was Jack Warren's speech defending the American Revolution as the most influential event in world history. What struck me as interesting about Mr. Warren's speech was how well he could defend a very ambitious claim, but also how he was able to sway so many delegates to support his claims too. By the time he had finished speaking I knew that I was going to be in for a week of sound political discourse and respectful exchange of ideas, something I am unable to find in my hometown.

By far the best event of the week was dining in and touring the Ben Franklin State Dining Room and Jefferson reception rooms in the State Department building. When I exited the elevator to enter the State room I was in awe at the busts of our Founding Fathers and the relics and paintings that are legendary representations of our country's history. Even the paper towels in the bathroom were so fancy I took one home as a souvenir! Despite the grandeur of the relics and paintings and fancy towels, nothing compared to the breathtaking beauty of the Benjamin Franklin State Dining Room. The entire time I was in the room I felt as though I was in a dream state while Mike Pompeo addressed the group and we dined on some excellent food. The State Department was my favorite excursion of Washington Week!

Another aspect of the program that I enjoyed was the Military Mentors. Before Washington Week, I had the misconception that all military personnel were no-nonsense, very serious men and women and that our mentors for the week would simply lead us from event to event and make sure we didn't get into trouble. While our mentors were no-nonsense, serious individuals who made sure all of us delegates were being respectful and rule-abiding individuals, talking with the mentors and listening to what motivated them to choose the military and what roles they had in their branches was eye opening and fascinating. Upon leaving Washington Week I had an even deeper respect for the men and women of our armed forces now that I had developed personal connections with the military mentors and knew who they really were past the uniform.

Now that I have had time to reflect upon Washington week, I realize just how seriously my life has changed. I have a much broader knowledge of the functions of our government that I had never known about before. I had my eyes opened to many different possible careers in public service beyond simply being a politician and began to think that being an ambassador to a foreign nation might be a fun job to have. I will never forget the experiences that I had during Washington week and I will be forever grateful to the Hearst Foundations for providing me with the opportunity to go on a trip like this.