

Will Schrepferman, IN – 2019

Dear United States Senate Youth Program,

When I received word that I had been selected to be a part of this program, my eyes were instantly drawn to the “\$10,000 scholarship” portion of the award rather than the part that described “Washington Week.” I can now proudly say my instincts have never been more wrong. I would trade my scholarship ten times over for another day with my fellow delegates in Washington, D.C.

I could write for pages upon pages about the experiences I was a part of during Washington Week. Over the course of the experience, I frantically recorded every detail in my notebook, but relaying every piece of my crazed shorthand would take more space than I’ve been allowed for this essay. From breakfasts with former judges of the United States Federal Circuit and associate FEMA administrators, to gripping accounts of Senate history in the Library of Congress, to shaking the hand of the chief justice of the Supreme Court, to dinners and luncheons with senators and Cabinet secretaries, to eating dinner fifty feet from the Constitution itself, to presidential receptions, there are no words that accurately capture my astonishment at the week I experienced.

However, my most profound realization of the week did not come as a result of one of these experiences, as incredible as they were. My epiphany came on the second day of the program; after Senator Ernst’s speech, my table of delegates dove headfirst into an in-depth, impromptu conversation on climate policy that none of us had remotely researched or prepared for. To an outside observer, though, it would have seemed as if my fellow delegates had dedicated months of research to the topic; the level of discussion was on a higher plane than I’ve ever experienced.

I realized that these one hundred and three students weren’t just delegates. These were the people who would be at those podiums addressing future USSYP delegates as Cabinet secretaries, ambassadors, senators, and presidents. This realization was cemented when, during breakfast on Thursday, Mr. Brian Kamoie of FEMA showed us his nametag from a long-past Washington Week. During that week, he was exactly like us, having discussions and forming lifelong bonds with his fellow delegates. And here he was years later living out the dream that speakers during his Washington Week had made real to him.

More than anything else, the United States Senate Youth Program served as a cross-section of tomorrow’s leaders. I know for a fact that the people I stood in line behind for oatmeal will be elected, appointed, and chosen for public service at the highest levels of government. I can see the fierce hourlong debate I had with a small group of other delegates on the government’s role in healthcare playing out on the Senate floor someday just as it did eating our boxed lunches on the eleventh floor of the Newseum.

Being a part of this cross-section was truly humbling. I came into the program with tentative plans to major in political science, but I can confidently say that Washington Week solidified my goals to become a public servant if for no other reason than to one day run into my fellow delegates in the hallways of the Capitol.

With deepest
appreciation,
Will Schrepferman, IN