

Shane Rose, MA – 2019

It is difficult to describe the impact Washington Week had on me because no words carry the magnitude of that experience. It is even more difficult to describe what I felt during one of the best weeks of my life. In D.C., we were surrounded by history and were opened to the inner-workings of the government. We were in the Pentagon, the White House, Supreme Court, and the Capitol, listening to the leaders of our country speak. On the first full day, I wrote, “looking back so far, I feel like I have been here for so long and have learned so much, yet today has only been our first full day,” and I think that sentence encompasses the week. In those 18-hour days, I learned what could not be taught in the classroom. I made genuine friendships with people living across the country. We stayed up late in the Mezzanine, having conversations about the day’s activities, policy, and projections for the 2020 presidential race. We were able to be ourselves. I was surrounded by people that came from different backgrounds than I did, yet we shared similar experiences and worries. We could share our honest thoughts and our true vulnerabilities with each other. The delegates were some of the most high achieving, intelligent, hardworking, and sincere young people I have ever met. Being with the delegates was one of the most memorable takeaways for me. I have an undoubted faith that we will be able to cross the aisle and work with each other in the future.

As amazing as it was to meet and listen to them, the most powerful speech did not come from President Trump or Secretary Pompeo, or Chief Justice Roberts. It came from my Military Mentor, Captain Iida. Going through the Arlington National Cemetery, he told us “they lay there, so we can stand here”. During Washington Week, my appreciation for democracy, freedom, and our country grew. However, nothing would be what it is today, without the millions of lives that have been lost. We would not be where we are today, without the men and women who have, who currently, and who will put on a uniform to protect and defend us. I was moved by Captain Iida’s words. I cannot express the respect and appreciation I have for our veterans and those currently serving. They may not have statues in the Capitol, but they are some of the bravest men and women in our nation. People have fought for this country, lost their lives for this country, and I feel an inspiration now, to serve our country.

The United States Senate Youth Program is many things; it is once-in-a-lifetime, educational, and amazing, but most of all, it is inspiring. We learned so much about our nation’s past, and the power of the past is driving me towards the future. I feel inspired to serve and preserve the freedoms of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness, just as the millions before me have. After Washington Week, my desire to be involved in public service has been reaffirmed.

I am so grateful for the Hearst Foundations and cannot even imagine what goes into planning one of the most remarkable, high-profile weeks of the year. The Hearst Foundations has done so much for us, invested so much in us; I hope that we can show they made the right investments. This week would also not have been as impactful or possible without the other delegates, photographers, Military Mentors, and USSYP staff. Thank you for everything you have done to make Washington Week so special. I hope I can bring a little piece of USSYP back home to Massachusetts.