

Jack W. Heinemann, NV – 2019

For an entire week, I had the honor and distinct privilege of serving as one of the one-hundred four delegates at the United States Senate Youth Program during Washington Week. I walked through the halls of history at the Newseum and the White House. I dined next to the U.S. Constitution and the Declaration of Independence at the National Archives. I lodged at the historic Mayflower Hotel. I asked hard-hitting questions to a revolutionary war historian and a highly accredited journalist. I was inspired by the speeches of the chief justice of the Supreme Court and the Senate parliamentarian. I got to shake the hands of both my state's U.S. senators and the president of the United States of America. Washington week honestly felt like a fantasy.

When I arrived back home, I was swarmed by friends and family with questions about this fantasy. I found that it was hard to describe all the fantastic experiences I had. I even face the challenge right now as I try to write how incredible Washington Week was. I wish that I could've worn a GoPro to Washington to capture the immensity of all the encounters I had. Although with all the metal detectors I had to go through, it might not have worked out. However, I'd like to describe a few of my favorite moments.

On the third night of the program, I had the opportunity to sit next to a revolutionary war historian at dinner. This historian's name, coincidentally, was Jack Warren, while my full name is Jack Warren Heinemann. I immediately pointed out the similarities in our name, and we instantly bonded. I asked him all sorts of questions, ranging from personal ones like "How did you fall in love with the American Revolutionary War?" to historical questions like "What would George Washington say about American politics if he were alive today?" For two hours, I got to listen to a brilliant historian and an incredibly intriguing discussion. Toward the end of our conversation, I gave him my business card, and he told me that he'd put it right on his wall of presidential memorabilia. I was truly honored.

My next favorite moment was when I met my two United States senators from Nevada. Jacky Rosen was one of the first senators to arrive at the reception. When she came up to me and the other delegate, she immediately started to talk about the statements she read about us. She talked about how I'm the Student Body president for my school and how the other delegate was the state president of DECA. Senator Rosen was extremely personable, and I had a fantastic time getting to talk to her. Right before we were about to take our picture, the other senator from Nevada, Catherine Cortez Masto entered the room. Senator Cortez Masto and I talked about the recent campaign I worked on. Thus, the other delegate and I were in paradise as we got to have an astonishing conversation with both of our senators, at the same time, which is a scarce opportunity.

My final favorite opportunity I'll mention is perhaps the most astounding moment I will ever remember in my life. On the sixth day, I went through numerous security checkpoints, and I had finally entered the White House through the East Wing. When we got in, we were told that this tour was self-guided and that we were free to walk through the halls of this historic mansion. I remember walking through the Green Room, the Blue Room, the Red Room, and the dining room, with no escort or tour guide. As I

got outside of the dining room and into the main hall, I walked forward in this iconic hall. I realized that this average height boy, with a funny last name, from the biggest little city in the world, Reno, Nevada, had experienced a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. As a massive fan of the West Wing, Scandal, House of Cards, and Madam Secretary, but also an enormous fan of presidential history, walking through the White House, alone and at my own pace was breathtaking. It honestly felt like I was walking on clouds. Clouds with the footsteps of past world leaders, past presidents, and countless brilliant men and women. While I passed the portraits of Presidents Kennedy and Reagan and the busts of Presidents Washington and Lincoln, I realized that this fantasy was a reality. Not just touring the White House, but meeting with U.S. senators, hearing distinguished public servants speak, and learning something new every single day.

However, my overall favorite opportunity was getting to meet incredible young, bright minds. I learned a considerable amount from the other delegates. I learned from a Wyoming delegate, who told me that his town was so small that he'd been the only volunteer for countless campaigns around his community. My roommate from Maryland taught me how he tries to keep his strong religious background out of his political views. I learned a great extent about the U.S. Senate from a Maine delegate as he was once a page for his senator. I often found myself discussing a variety of topics with the other delegates. On the plane departing to Washington, I sat right next to my co-delegate from Nevada. We talked about the issues affecting Nevada like the overcrowding in schools and the business boom. I spoke of the ideology of the Supreme Court with a delegate from New Jersey and the upcoming 2020 presidential election with a delegate from Illinois. However, of course, I ran into several debates with delegates. I debated about the proposed wall from the president, with a delegate from Virginia. I debated about abortion with a delegate from Wyoming. At lunch, several delegates and I debated about how we can improve education in the United States. Moderating these debates were the Military Mentors, and I must add that they did a job well done. I'd recommend them to moderate the upcoming presidential debates. Although sparks would flare and voices rose, after every debate, the delegates and I walked away with the same understanding that all 104 of us want the same thing, to make this home of the brave and land of the free a more perfect nation.

At the end of Washington Week, all the delegates and I sang "Lean on Me", and it is in that song's lyrics that truly capture the spirit of this delegation; "Lean on me, when you're not strong, I'll be your friend, I'll help you carry on." Climate change, corruption, immigration, poverty, and attacks on the free press are launching America and the world into a darker point of history. The world can lean on this next generation because we will help this nation and the world carry on.