

Ward Wilson, SC - 2019

The United States Senate Youth Program's Washington Week is an experience that I will remember and cherish for the rest of my life. From listening to all of the amazing keynote speakers to eating dinner beside the Constitution to shaking hands with the President of the United States, Washington Week was monumental. We had the opportunity to see firsthand how our federal government operates and we learned about the great work that leaders in our country are doing to serve the citizenry. I especially appreciated how every speaker put great care into every word that they gave us and greatly valued their time with us, taking as many questions as time allowed (and then a few more) following their remarks. While my Senators unfortunately did not come to the Senate reception, we still explored all branches and facets of the government and could see the inner workings of our government, seeing that the leaders who run our country are people too, just like us, and they care deeply about their service.

While I learned a significant amount from those who spoke to us, I also learned a great deal from my fellow delegates. Throughout Washington Week we were exposed to differing opinions and ideologies that created healthy and constructive discourse. Whether it was a thought-provoking question to a speaker, a riveting conversation while dining, or a late night debate, I was able to learn so much from my fellow delegates and was able to broaden my own perspective by conversing with them. While delegates discussed political issues often having opposing opinions, through a willingness to seek to understand each other we found out that we agreed on more than we originally believed. Through my discussions with my fellow delegates, I learned that we are much more alike than we are different.

I made so many great friends during Washington Week and was so excited to be able to meet other youth interested in our government and public service. I learned what life was like in all corners of the great United States and was able to share some pretty amazing experiences with some pretty amazing peers. I will keep many of my friends from USSYP for the rest of my life and I hope to see many of them back in Washington one day serving our country.

These experiences that came together to form Washington Week instilled in me sight of the true beauty, uniqueness, and value of our free Republic and the week brought me to greater realize the great sacrifices by many men and women that have brought us to where we are today. Because of USSYP, I have a greater sense of appreciation for our elected officials and a greater love for our country and system of government. I was inspired by the sense of duty and honor that our military mentors exemplified, and I am appreciative of all of the people who made this year's United States Senate Youth Program happen. Washington Week has inspired me to pursue public service and lead my peers today to become more involved in government and the political process, because it is important to preserving democracy. USSYP brought me to learn some invaluable lessons, grow a greater love and appreciation for my country, and make 103 outstanding friends with whom I shared the experience of a lifetime.