

**Emmalyn Pykles, UT - 2019**

**Still Not Used To It**  
A Reflection

I am a firm believer that everything happens for a reason. Yes, there are always multiple possible outcomes to a situation but that doesn't mean any one of them could be the "right" outcome, that every one of them could teach you something important. So you can imagine that when I read the fateful letter all of us received, telling me I had been selected as a delegate for the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP), not only was I flabbergasted, euphoric, and emotional but also ponderous. I didn't know the exact circumstance that had led me to where I was, or why I had been so fortunate out of so many qualified contestants, but I knew that there was a reason. To gain public-speaking experience? To witness some part of the political process that would be instrumental in my future career? To make lifelong friendships or an important connection? These and a million more possibilities raced through my mind that night and swirled in my head in the months and weeks leading up to Washington Week. All I knew for certain, was that something was waiting for me.

Fast forward, to the last week of February 2019 and I am packing to go to D.C. to finally find out my purpose in this incredible adventure. I was extremely excited, but also apprehensive wondering if maybe somehow this was all a test. But within minutes of getting to the airport and sitting down next to my fellow Utah delegate on the plane, I was already comfortable. All expectations and worries were gone and I let myself truly enjoy the "ride." This immediately brought so much peace and connection with my other delegates, and I wondered if THIS was the reason for such an opportunity; for me to feel so connected to so many incredible people.

But then we started the actual agenda of the program. The unparalleled whirlwind of speakers who presented at Washington Week was almost too much to take in, but in meditating upon my favorite experiences of the trip, one clear pattern stands out. My favorite and the most memorable speakers were not those who occupied elected office, but rather, those who filled appointed or merit-based positions. In general, I found the candidness and personal appeal of the speakers who were un-elected to be greater and magnetizing; the honesty, warmth, and power of these individuals made a lasting impression and it was in their remarks that I found the most personal clarity regarding political matters and how I fit into this complex world of issues.

Like most of the speakers of Washington Week 2019, these unelected speakers spoke about bipartisanship and working across the aisle, and from them I truly felt the need and desire to do so. To me, it was clear that they had ended up in their positions because of a simple foundation of wanting to make a difference in the world. This was extremely powerful to me, as my desire to make an impact is one of very few stipulations I can state about what I want to do for a future career. I may not know the specifics of what I wish to pursue, but I have that desire as a guiding value and it was incredibly comforting to witness the many different avenues of opportunity that have been taken by those with the same foundation.

Again, my idea of purpose shifted when I heard Senator Joni Ernst speak; it was while she was speaking that I really realized what this whole experience was about for me. The senator's powerful remarks regarding gratitude reminded me of a thought I had heard someone share at a musical concert a couple of weeks prior, "My goal is to never get used to anything in life". After hearing Senator Ernst's thoughts on the importance of gratitude, remembering that thought gave me chills. This concept of practicing active gratitude and

wonder EVERY day could surely apply no more perfectly than in the situation I was currently in; where I was being waited on hand and foot, sleeping in one of the best hotels, eating the best food, wearing the fanciest clothes, and meeting with some of the most important people. Yet, as the week progressed I found my comfort turn towards twinges of apathy and that SCARED me. From experience, I knew that I desperately wanted to stay in that place of non-acclimation because of the feelings of heightened happiness and forever memories it created for me. The one thing that consistently brought me back to the place of wonder and thankfulness I craved, were the discussions I got to have with the people around me. From conversations with Mr. Jason Hearst's delightful fiancée about the importance of education, to talking about first kisses and such at midnight with my two roommates, to comparing similarities between my religion and a fellow delegate's (that are often pitted against each other), I found myself feeling overwhelmingly grateful for and in awe of the people around me: the staff, the security, the servers, the hotel employees, the hosts, the speakers, the incredible Military Mentors, and most of all the delegates, all added a part to my experience and, as a result, to who I am now as a person.

Over the course of the week, the pattern of -- food, speaker, walk a bit, food, speaker, repeat -- became somewhat routine. Yet as I look back on USSYP, I remember how incredible that routine was and realize how much I would give to be back in those patterns with those people – a group of people that will never be assembled in exactly the same way ever again. Although that thought makes me sad, it more helps me to appreciate what I had. Like the exhibit honoring 9/11 that I witnessed in the Newseum, it helps me to resolve to *never forget*. And I hope I NEVER get used to the idea that I, Emmalyn Aline Pykles, of humble but blessed origins, got to experience Washington Week 2019; that I got to be peers with the future leaders of our world. That I have lifelong friends across the nation. I hope I never forget to be grateful for my privilege of living in the most blessed nation on earth.