

## **Rohan Shah, VA – 2019**

When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change. My week in D. C. was one of the greatest weeks of my life, I would like to share the few moments which were especially poignant which I will undoubtedly cherish for the rest of my life. Summarizing my time during Washington Week seems like an almost impossible task. There is no perfect way to encapsulate the memories, relationships, and experiences gained during my stay in such a short essay. However, I will do my best.

The United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) offers so many opportunities that simply can't be obtained anywhere else. As a delegate from Virginia, I was responsible for laying a wreath next to the final resting place of President George Washington at Mount Vernon. You know it's a special day when you are standing beside the founder of our great nation! A particular quote from George Washington still remains with me: "now or never our deliverance must come." Especially in today's world, it is important to be decisive because true leadership comes from making tough decisions. Change happens for those who make it.

Having the opportunity to meet and question the policymakers of our country was absolutely phenomenal. I had the honor of asking Chief Justice John Roberts his best piece of advice and was able to shake the hand of the president. Regardless of political differences, the willingness of these leaders to listen to questions and provide honest answers really made the experience all the more special. One of my favorite speakers during the week was Deputy Director of National Intelligence Susan Gordon. She offered her frank opinion on some of the United States' most significant national security threats including China, Russia, and transnational organized crime and even weighed in on the debate between privacy vs. security. Listening to her and other public servants speak honestly and transparently about the issues that the country will have to face in the years to come increased my faith in our democracy. Typically, we don't know the names of the people behind the scenes who do the work to make our country function, so it was a pleasure to interact with these people and learn from their experiences.

My favorite part of the week without a doubt would be my new friendships with the 103 other delegates and Military Mentors. Listening to my fellow delegates talk about life back home was, in my opinion, just as valuable as listening to our keynote speakers. I learned what life was like living on a farm in the Midwest and how tariffs affected crop prices which directly impacted their family's livelihood. I learned how my peers took the initiative in their communities to empower and make a positive impression on those coming after them. I learned that although we may come from different places, and may differ politically, we all at the end of the day want what's best for our country.

I want to give my sincere gratitude to the United States Senate Youth Program, the Hearst Foundations, our United States politicians and public servants, and Military Mentors for providing me with memories and lessons that will last a lifetime. Washington Week inspired me, it humbled me, and it made me proud to live in the best country in the world. I am thankful to have seen that the future of our nation is bright and that the best is yet to come.