

Allyson Fergot, WI – 2019

December 3rd, 2019. I had this day marked in my calendar for the past month. It was the day I would be notified if I had been selected as a delegate for the United States Senate Youth Program. I spent that morning updating my email every two minutes and preparing for the worst. Right as I convinced myself I didn't get it, I got the email I had been waiting all day for. I jumped up from my seat in bio, confusing my classmates, and went to the hallway to call my parents and grandparents to share the good news. I was so thrilled to receive not only the scholarship, but also the trip to D.C. Little did I know how life-changing Washington Week would be.

In the days leading up to March 2nd, my departure day to D.C., I was feeling a range of emotions. Stress for packing and buying last minute business attire. Nerves for meeting the other, highly qualified delegates and flying by myself for the first time. Excitement for the adventure ahead. When the day finally arrived, I was too tired to process all the feelings I had. I am many things, but a morning person is not one of them. However, when I landed in D.C. and met the other delegates, the nerves I had felt earlier in the week dissipated. The other delegates were so nice, funny, and welcoming. I got along great with the girl I sat by on the bus who, as fate may have it, turned out to be my roommate. After meeting the other delegates, I felt relieved. Intimidated still by how crazy impressive they all are, but relieved by their kindness. The end of the first day included going over the plans for the week. The schedule was chock-full of amazing places and speakers and I felt eager to take on the week.

One of my favorite places we visited was the Newseum. As someone who is considering a career in journalism, a museum dedicated to the freedom of the press was right up my alley. Exploring the museum and seeing the history it contained was incredible. I have a picture on my phone of some delegates and I smiling in front of a part of the Berlin Wall! How cool is that!? My favorite part of the museum, though, was the hall of Pulitzer prize winning photographs. Walking through the hall was like watching the world change. Every picture told its own story. These stories revealed what was happening in the world that year, which left me feeling extremely humbled and moved as I saw the progress we've made thus far and how far we still have to go. The Newseum was easily one of the best museums I have visited and I know I'll remember the thought-provoking feeling it left me with.

Another high point of the week was the Senate Reception event. This is the main event of the week as our senators are the reason we are even in D.C. Although waiting felt like forever, meeting the senators was well worth the wait. I was lucky enough to have both my senators show at the reception and I felt equally star struck by both. Senator Tammy Baldwin was so kind to me and my fellow Wisconsinite, Layne, and took the time to learn our names before arriving. Senator Ron Johnson made sure to allow time for us to ask him any questions we had. It was inspiring to meet two federal officials whose success I admire so much. Even though they are on opposite ends of the political spectrum, the opportunity to meet both is one I'm truly grateful for. Besides meeting my senators, the night also included being in the same room as presidential candidates and some great food. I can now gloat to my friends that Bernie Sanders walked three feet from me and I have a video for proof. The dinner consisted of chicken strips and mac-and-cheese bites, which was refreshing since the other meals during Washington Week, while delicious, are quite fancy. The Senate Reception stood out to me because it allowed me to meet or see some of my favorite politicians and still have a relaxed, fun time with the other delegates.

When the week came to an end and I was again in Wisconsin I wanted to go back immediately. While it was nice to be back home, I found myself missing the other delegates. Throughout the week there are many amazing speakers we hear, breathtaking places we visit, and delicious food we eat, but what makes Washington Week special is the time spent with the other delegates. Whether that be debating policy or joking about the famous "Ladies and Gentlemen, may I have your attention please?" phrase, the connections made with your fellow delegates are ones that last (I hope) a lifetime. My favorite memories of the week come from the discussions I had with them or dancing with them until 1:00 a.m. in the basement of the Mayflower. The friends I made while in D.C. are ones I know I can count on in the future. My fellow delegates helped restore my faith in democracy as we live in these tumultuous times because I know each of them are capable of leading our country to true greatness. I can't wait to see where we all end up. Hopefully the White House. I can't imagine better leaders for our country. I'll forever be grateful to the Hearst Foundations and the United States Senate Youth Program for the amazing opportunity they granted me and for all the friendships I made. I hope to make my other delegates as proud of me as I already am of them.