

Savannah Alexander, DC – 2023

As a delegate from Washington, D.C., I attended the 2023 United States Senate Youth Program, a unique opportunity to learn about government and leadership from some of the nation's most prominent leaders. On our opening night, program director Rayne Guilford insightfully remarked that our experience at Washington Week would be the "Olympics of public service." The highlight of Washington Week for me was our delegate's visit to the Pentagon, where we met with Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley and Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chairman Ramón Colón-López.

During our visit to the Pentagon, we had the opportunity to tour the building and learn more about its storied history. We also learned more about the seen and unseen work members of our Armed Forces dutifully complete to serve our nation. During a tour of the Pentagon facilities, we visited the 9/11 chapel, where I had a solemn and reflective experience. Our tour guide, a member of the Air Force honor guard, relayed the stories of survivors of the tragic events of September 11, 2001. The tour guide's oration was a powerful reminder of the tragedy of that historic day and the importance of our national security.

One thing that struck me during our meeting with Chairman Milley was his impressive command presence. Chairman Milley immediately commanded the room from moments before he entered as the anticipation of his arrival built. Chairman Milley exuded confidence and authority in a way that I found both inspiring and intimidating. As a young person interested in politics and law, I was impressed by General Milley's ability to lead and command others. I plan to integrate some of his leadership skills into my own as I continue to develop my personal leadership style.

Senior Enlisted Advisor Colón-López, on the other hand, was unexpectedly funny. He had a great sense of humor and lightened the room's mood in an entertaining and inspiring way. One of SEAC Colón-López's lessons to delegates was that leaders should never forget to have fun and to maintain a positive attitude, even in the most challenging situations. When leaders show positivity and entertainment, they encourage their team to have fun while working hard. It was a lesson I took to heart and hope to remember as I continue to grow as a leader.

Overall, Washington Week 2023 was an exceptional experience. Meeting with leaders like Chairman Milley and Senior Enlisted Advisor Colón-López was an incredible honor, and their examples of leadership will stay with me for years to come. Washington Week gave me a new perspective on the city I call home, Washington, D.C., and its critical role in our nation's government and national defense.