

Jack Lakis, GA – 2023

When addressing the delegates, program director Rayne Guilford titled Washington Week as “the Olympics of public service.” After participating, it is clear that Guilford’s statement is a perfect way to describe the United States Senate Youth Program.

Washington Week gave me an opportunity to candidly converse with figures I had only ever seen on television, people who I never imagined would be just a few feet away from me. Our delegate class participated in events ranging from a dinner with a Senator in the rotunda of the National Archives to a meeting with Chairman Mark Milley in the Pentagon. Their presence juxtaposed power with modesty, ultimately guiding open and powerful discussions about society’s most pressing concerns.

As we met with figures from a breadth of government agencies, a collective need to embrace bipartisanship in creating public policy was emphasized time and time again.

When I sat at the dinner table with Senator Shelley Moore-Capito of West Virginia, she expressed her devotion to working alongside members of the opposing party. Her work demands common sense solutions that thwart hyperpolarization and promote a stronger, more united America.

Potentially even more satisfying, though, was the insight we gained from individuals whose roles in our government are solely nonpartisan. After her presentation, I had the opportunity to speak one-on-one with Senate Parliamentarian Elizabeth MacDonough. After law school, she clerked for the D.C. Circuit Court, which spearheaded her commitment to fairness and the enforcement of the rule of law. Now, her role in the Senate is entirely apolitical and she works to maintain honesty in legislation and civility in the chamber of the world’s greatest deliberative body.

Formative, educational experiences are what empower leaders and create trailblazers. For this reason, I will forever be grateful to The Hearst Foundations and the staff of the Senate Youth Program for giving me the guidance and motivation to strive for greatness.

As well, I cannot understate the privilege of meeting my co-delegates—103 other incredibly kind, enthusiastic, and inspiring young leaders. The shared experience of the Senate Youth Program was certainly a catalyst to the minds who will go on to mold the rising generation. We are all emboldened to be public servants and to think outside of ourselves to search for the greater good. I have no doubt that the delegates will thrive personally and professionally, and I am honored to call them my friends.

After this experience, I can confidently conclude that wherever my career takes me, I will remain devoted to public service. During the program, Supreme Court Justice Sotomayor declared that “if you don’t try, change isn’t possible,” and urged delegates not to become “the bystander that gets hit by the bus.” Because of Washington Week, instead of sitting idly by, I hope to become one of America’s voices for justice, peace, and prosperity.