

Sejal Sekhar, MO – 2023

March 4th: Flight AA 4582 from St. Louis will arrive in D.C. in an estimated 2 hours and 7 minutes. Sit tight ladies and gentlemen and enjoy the flight.

Little did I know this flight would be my first step into entering a program full of 104 students from across the country with one uniting factor: the desire for justice. While Washington Week began with meeting 103 strangers, it ended with me meeting 103 of the most inspiring minds of today's world.

Washington Week provides delegates with the opportunity to not only learn about the government around us, but to foster our curiosity. We were taught to ask questions to expand our horizons, we were taught to embrace a differing perspective, but most importantly, we were taught to live in a mindset that never stops working towards a better tomorrow. I have consistently heard that our generation is going to be the change, that it is our responsibility and duty to use the knowledge we have to right society's wrongs. However, I never understood why this mission was placed upon our generation until this trip. The passion and dedication that our generation possesses is our greatest power. We have the opportunity to unite through technology and use our collective voice to fight for what we believe in.

In a world where politics have become more polarized than ever, I have been taught what true bipartisanship means through my co-delegates. Each time our views differed it sparked a conversation rather than a fight. We listened and asked questions, and through mutual curiosity to understand the opposite perspective, we were able to reach commonality. Through distinguished speakers like Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor and Senator John Hickenlooper, we were able to learn how to foster our fighting spirit to continue making a difference. According to Justice Sotomayor, we have a choice of being a bystander or taking action. If we continue in a world of compliance, our world will continue to become further polarized, but if we take an active presence within our government, we can create a world where bipartisanship is the norm.

My experience is hard to summarize into words as it is the emotional connection I was able to create with my co-delegates that truly made this a life-changing experience. USSYP has cemented the importance of curiosity in me while giving me a network of individuals that I know I can depend upon at any time. While my time in Washington Week did come to an end, the experiences and connections I have made never will. This program is eternal as the lessons I have learned will forever guide me in my future endeavors for years to come.

March 10th: Flight AA 5018 from D.C. to St. Louis has just landed, welcome back. But little do they know I have come back to St. Louis a changed person thanks to USSYP and the 103 friends I made along the way.