

Isabella Klink, NY – 2023

When I was first selected for the United States Senate Youth Program, I could not imagine it would be “life-changing.” I always thought that was a foolish term and that nothing could dramatically change how I view the world. But I was wrong, and it is safe to say that the 61st Annual Washington Week has easily been the life-altering event of my life. From the places we visited to the friends I made, this was a week I will never forget.

During Washington Week, every speaker shared different stories that felt impactful in different ways. However, the speaker that left the most profound impression on me was Justice Sonia Sotomayor. It was terrific to hear from a fellow New Yorker about how she overcame adversity, especially as a young adult preparing to enter the real world. She was incredibly down to earth, humble, and her insight was invaluable. Justice Sotomayor made me confident in my career path and further motivated me to pursue public service. I deeply resonated with her convictions that stubbornness can lead to success in the field of law and how she will never “give up control of [her] life to others.” Meeting with Justice Sonia Sotomayor was an honor, and I will carry her words with me as I begin my undergraduate journey.

While we did not meet with a keynote speaker at the Arlington National Cemetery, this experience was incredibly moving during Washington Week. It brought me to tears. The level of respect for our military displayed at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier left me speechless. It meant a lot to me to honor these soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. I know it felt significant to our Military Mentors who are currently serving, which made it that much more special. The Tomb was breathtaking, and the quiet atmosphere truly allowed us to feel and live in the moment. This event evoked genuine emotion in me. The feeling of honoring our military as 104 delegates representing every region of our country was indescribable.

Overall, the lessons I learned, the people I met, and the places I visited were all significant in their own ways. Washington Week was indeed the Olympics of public service and thank goodness we were gifted USSYP notebooks to document our journey. The United States Senate Youth Program was an experience I will hold dear to my heart for the rest of my life. I will forever be grateful that I received this life-changing opportunity.