

Faith You, MT – 2024

I have never experienced anything like Washington Week. We came from every corner of the United States (and beyond), yet we were able to create one unbreakable bond over the course of just one week. When I initially arrived at the Mayflower Hotel, I thought: how much could my life *possibly* change through this singular experience? As I left before the sun rose on departure day, my heart and notebook were newly full of wisdom from trailblazing speakers and heartfelt messages from my fellow delegates. I thought: how will any experience *ever* top this one?

We stayed at the White House until midnight, watching the State of the Union address, meeting both President Biden and Dr. Jill Biden, and running into Dance Moms icon Dr. Holly. We toured the Pentagon and met *the* highest-ranking military official. We had various opportunities to listen to and engage with civic servants who act as the backbone of our country. Our worldviews were developed, and we gained insight into the inner workings of the leadership that takes place at the federal level.

What sticks out to me most, however, is the relationships that were formed within our cohort. The 103 new individuals I had the honor of meeting have truly impacted my life forever, small and large. From speaking with the southern delegates, I learned how to *truly* speak with a southern drawl. From the northeastern delegates, I learned how their subway and train systems functioned. From all the delegates, I was inspired by their ambitious work ethic. Additionally, they all held fiery passions they fostered and wielded to initiate lasting change within their communities. Because of them, I was able to return home as a stronger, more courageous, and creative leader.

A theme that was consistent throughout the week was political polarization. There's no doubt that our nation is more divided than it has ever been. Trust in our government has been staggeringly low in the past few years, and the media has portrayed our future to be grim and dark. Being in DC, however, has proved to me that brighter days are coming soon. I have a newfound faith in our nation.

Though we are all from drastically different walks of life (both where cows outnumber humans and some of the largest cities in the world), I have never met a more united group. As Senator Bill Cassidy mentioned, the torch has been passed to our generation, and I already see us sprinting into the future with this wonderful country on our backs.

After even the most exhausting days, we all had smiles on our faces and looked forward to what lay ahead on the next day and the next. My bus, Coach 1, ended each caffeine-fueled day singing "Country Roads" as one body- voices cracking and sleep slowly forcing our eyes shut. These little moments are what have cemented Washington Week in my mind.

On the final night of the program, I had the privilege of delivering one of the two keynote speeches for this 62nd class of the United States Senate Youth Program. I remember looking out into the crowd and recognizing how each face had become a friend. I felt such pride in knowing that our future was in good hands. My fellow delegates have goals much larger than themselves, goals that are going to (and already have) transform the world.

It was an absolute honor to serve as one of the delegates from the Big Sky State. It is an experience that has been etched into my heart and mind for eternity.