

Max Grinstein, NV – 2024

Getting to the 62nd annual Senate Youth Program wasn't easy. There were essays to write, recommendation letters to obtain, and interviews to prepare for. But the challenge that I feared the most wasn't the application process; it was the weather. Several days before Washington Week began, the National Weather Service put out a bulletin stating there would be season-high snow fall in Northern Nevada—beginning the morning that my flight to Washington, D.C. was scheduled to depart. Frantically, I called the Senate Youth Program office, more times than I'd care to admit, fearing that my flight would be canceled. Senate Youth Program staff advised me to hunker down, generously booking me a hotel room next to the airport so that I could safely travel there before the blizzard began. Ultimately, they were right, and I arrived at Reagan National Airport with time to connect with several Nevada alumni welcoming delegates to the Mayflower Hotel. My first real interaction with Senate Youth Program staff exhibited professionalism and experience on their part that would become a recurring theme throughout Washington Week.

While it might not have been easy to travel to Washington Week, I am thankful that my travel ended successfully. Indeed, at nearly every moment, I was shocked by the level of insider access afforded to us by our hosts at the Hearst Foundations. Guest speakers included three senators, two cabinet secretaries, a Supreme Court justice, a House member, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the secretary of the Senate, the Senate Parliamentarian, the Senate Historian, the Archivist of the United States, the librarian of Congress, and other national decision makers and visionaries. We toured the Pentagon, dined under the rotunda at the National Archives, and solemnly laid a wreath at Arlington National Cemetery.

When Secretary Blinken addressed our group over lunch at the Benjamin Franklin State Dining Room, one of my tablemates, a seasoned State Department press staffer, told me that it was only his second time hearing his boss speak in person. Our group of 104 student delegates was lucky enough to receive that privilege after only an hour at the State Department. With more than six decades of experience, Senate Youth Program staff have certainly honed their skills at soliciting guest speakers! And, of course, I've neglected to mention Washington Week's *pièce de resistance*: watching the State of the Union in the White House, only for the president and the first lady to show up after departing the Capitol.

Still, as memorable as the glitz of the East Room may have been, what sticks out to me about my time in D.C. is just as much the informal conversations that I had throughout the week. My roommate's voracious language learning inspired (and, admittedly, intimidated) me, and I was eager to learn about the experiences of DoDEA delegates who lived overseas while their parents served in the armed forces. Indeed, the opportunity to interact with Military Mentors in an informal context was yet another highlight of the week. My Military Mentor, Captain Andrew Carroll, is a Nuclear and Missile Operations Officer who regaled our group with stories about deterrence policy. I was continuously impressed each time I had the opportunity to interact with military officers, and Captain Carroll was no exception. In fact, several weeks after I returned to Reno, I was touched to receive a personal letter along with a patch and a lapel pin from his unit.

Throughout Washington Week, my co-delegate, Robert, and I took pride in serving as informal emissaries for the Silver State—implored our new friends that Nevada has more than *just* casinos. Along with Military Mentor and Lake Tahoe-native Lieutenant Kate Krolicki (NV – 2016), we were joined at various points throughout the week by Jayne Malorni of the Nevada Department of Education and Nevadans Zhan Okuda Lim (NV – 2010) and Jason Lillebo (SD – 1993). Collectively, we brought a distinct Nevada flare to Washington Week. Robert and I even had the opportunity to introduce Senator Cortez Masto, one of this year's two Senate Youth Program co-chairs, over dinner at the Mayflower Hotel. Senator Cortez Masto's remarks highlighted her family's Nevada journey and taught us the value of showing up *and* following up. In the years to come, the Capitol-flown flags that we each received from Senator Cortez Masto and Senator Barrasso, her Co-Chair, will continue to serve as moving reminders of the sense of civic pride and responsibility instilled in us as delegates.