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## Washington Week

I recently returned to Washington, D.C. for an outstanding week of political and cultural immersion through the U.S. Senate Youth Program (USSYP)—thanks to the staff at the Hearst Foundation. Underneath the all-star guest line-up, fabulous venue, and flawless coordination of the week's events, however, exists the singular fabric that connects all aspects of that unforgettable experience—the discourse and engagement. Indeed, what made Washington Week so meaningful and memorable was the dominance of *communication*.

One of the most remarkable facets of the week was the combined experience and talent of our guest speakers. Guests ranged from our newest Supreme Court Justice (Sonia Sotomayor) and the Deputy Secretary of State (James Steinberg), to a number of successful USSYP alumni (including Robert Henry, Chief Judge of the 10<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals) and even President Obama. These leaders shared glimpses of their own paths in public service, commented on a range of current debates (including health care and education reform), and explained a number of life lessons they learned throughout their careers.

Interestingly enough, none of them doubted the rapid-onset Potomac Fever that we were sure to experience. What they did, however, was remind us repeatedly to put values and insights in constant view, both inside and outside of the belt-loop. In the words of one of our guests, Brian Lamb (CEO of C-SPAN): “Put this week into perspective: many other people with the simplest things. Do not forget.”

The dialogue that the 103 other delegates and I were able to carry on with these individuals was another extraordinary aspect of the week. The delegates that were seated with these officials at meals were able to engage in lively discussions that, more often than not, continued during the speaker's presentation. Afterward, dozens of hands would shoot up. We knew the opportunity to ask things like “What is the future of print media, in your opinion?” to the editor of a major magazine was fleeting and rare. Communication, in this respect, made sure that we were each able to extract unique messages from the experience.

The communication between the delegates, however, solidifies the experience because it solidifies relationships. There's no experience quite like meeting 103 of extremely intelligent, passionate peers from every state of the union, every walk of life, and every ideological inclination. It's actually because you have shared a once-in-a-lifetime with your new friends that, ultimately, a lot of the communication becomes tacit.

That simultaneously tacit understanding and active dialogue defines my memories from Washington Week. They also compose the strongest fibers of communication, propelling us forward in our public service with both memories and action in hand.