

Hahn Chang – MN

The United States Senate Youth Program was the single greatest week of my life. I have had the honor and privilege of talking with the Indian Ambassador to the United States, being in the presence of President Barack Obama, and shaking hands with Justice Sonia Sotomayor. Throughout the week, whether it was visiting the museums, the memorials, or the landmarks, I was struck with the history and the energy of the city. The vibrant nature of Washington D.C. shone throughout the week everywhere we went.

However, the favorite part of this program for me was the honor of meeting 103 fellow delegates from across the country, and the 17 military mentors. With almost all of the delegates and many of the military mentors, I shared a close personal bond which is not only irreplaceable, but unforgettable. My only regret about the program was that I did not have more time with the 4 or 5 delegates and the 6 military mentors I did not speak to as much through the week. Despite this, the friendships that I formed through the week were the ones that I hope to carry through with my lifetime. One of the first things I did when I got home was write down my memories with each delegate, and it took me five hours to complete. As I wrote down each one, I had flashbacks from Washington Week: dancing on the balcony of the Kennedy Center with Cara Torres (NM), debating healthcare with Logan Shelton (AL), preparing speeches and comedy routines with Hayley Jones (IL), creating graphs with Laurel Cavallo (NV), and sharing regional slang with Haley Nelson (AL).

The most striking event for me was visiting Arlington National Cemetery. The chilly rain perfectly captured our mood that day. I cried twice during USSYP, on the last morning and as I walked through Arlington with Allison Taylor (MS) as we examined the gravestones of mere teenagers who had died for their country. As we walked through it struck me that these boys, who were only a few years older than I, died for an imperfect country. However, they died for an imperfect country because they believed in its perfect ideals. As I thought about this, it really clicked to me the idea of service that had been instilled within us throughout the week. As a result of our many gifts, as a result of our many fortunes, and as a result of the opportunity of Washington Week, we had the duty to continue in service for others. I understood that anyone could serve their country, and we as USSYP delegates most certainly should.

While I know that Washington Week is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, I have proudly kept in contact with many of my friends from the program. I know that we will never be all together in the Mayflower hotel; however, I will work to continue the friendships that I had formed that week. I will proudly keep service in the forefront of my mind as the military mentors did, as the program staff did, and as our speakers throughout the week did. For as Joe Riley (TN-2008) once told me, “a life void of service is a life void of purpose.”