

Mikayla Kelz, WI – 2017

I can remember the feeling of overwhelming and pure joy when I heard on December 1, 2016 that I was selected as one of two delegates from Wisconsin to attend the United States Senate Youth Program. Numerous months of desire and hard work finally rewarded. As I left my four thousand person inhabited town, little did I know the experience that awaited me and 103 delegates from around the country.

Excitement was around every corner during Washington Week. From listening to amazing speakers, visiting the White House, watching a Senate session, meeting our senators, laying a wreath at Mount Vernon, watching the changing of the guard at The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, to even eating dinner next to the original U.S. Constitution. Every moment of every day was exhilarating, full of knowledge, and an opportunity to do something that the average high school student doesn't receive. That is what made Washington Week so special, the delegates. Being able to socialize and have educated discussions with students my age was the best part of the week. The amazing week The Hearst Foundations had planned for us wouldn't be the same if it wasn't spent with the delegates of 2017. Having individuals from different cultures, political ideologies, and socio-economic classes contributed to a diverse and interesting week.

In addition to inspiring delegates, the speakers throughout the week gave insight that is beneficial to, not just my future, but everyone's. Although I am not interested in the medical field, my favorite speaker was Surgeon General of the United States VADM Vivek Murthy. He talked of living in the moment, with regard to the future. Students spend too much time on the long term, when the short term is equally as important. He also talked of the relationships and connections we make throughout our lives and how we should take them seriously and always be kind and conscientious, because they do matter. A quote from Dr. Murthy about connections that I remember to this day is, "We can only thrive as a country if we have connections with each other." A connected public is progress. Every speaker had something different to say, I enjoyed the diversity of positions and discussed topics. From hearing from President Trump to Jack Warren, executive director of the Society of the Cincinnati, every speaker was informative and courteous of the student perspective.

The United States Senate Youth Program will always be the most superlative week of my life. Throughout high school, I've devoted a plethora of my activities towards government and politics, but I was always unsure about my future, until Washington Week. I learned that I cannot plan out every aspect of my life, and one of the most important things is to do something you love and are passionate about in life. I also learned not all public service is in the government. Listening to Mark Shriver of the Save the Children Action Network, taught me that public service comes in all forms, as long as you are working for the people. Although I have goals and dreams for the future, it is okay to not have a set-in-stone plan for the future, as long as I am doing something I love and for the betterment of this country. The best opportunities and skills that I have learned have come from getting out of my comfort zone and the United States Senate Youth Program, definitely pushed me out of my comfort zone.

I would like to thank The Hearst Foundations for everything they have done. The Hearst Foundations have taught me more than the curriculum they planned throughout the week, they taught me true kindness. Listening to a representative from the foundation speak about how they helped their employees after Hurricane Katrina, truly touched me. They are an amazing foundation with phenomenal morals and a positive attitude. During Washington Week I experienced a new environment, an environment where people were supportive, encouraging, and had passion. In my future I want to carry out those ideals and implement them into my life.