

Evan Gong, NV – 2015

When I heard I was selected for the United States Senate Youth Program last fall, I was overjoyed and in complete disbelief. How many high school students have the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to witness the inner-workings of the United States government first-hand -- much less meet the President, a Supreme Court Justice, and the top congressional leaders?

My experience at Washington Week far exceeded my expectation and I treasured every minute of it. As I listened to our speakers offer their perspectives on why they pursued a career in public service, I was moved by their genuine commitment to making a difference in our society. I wanted to be in their shoes one day, solving real world problems, representing people, and shaping the course of our nation. Despite the partisan gridlock, finger-pointing, and rhetoric the media portrays, I left the program truly believing that Washington is a place where people can do good if they find ways to see beyond their differences. As Senator Susan Collins of Maine told us, we need to first treat others with dignity and respect before we can start working together.

When I reflect on USSYP in the future, I will always remember bonding over deep political discussions during dinner with my Military Mentor group, waltzing through the streets in a suit and tie (causing more than a few stares from passers-by), and indulging in a white chocolate-covered Capitol for dessert. Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia put it succinctly: "You'll see things this week that your friends at home will never get to see in their lives." The experience I shared in Washington with 103 fellow delegates, staff, and Military Mentors was truly the most amazing week of my life.