

Veronica Ma, CT - 2015

The unique opportunities afforded to me during Washington Week have deepened my understanding of service in our country. I have learned from some of the most experienced members of Washington, D.C. that components of service, such as leadership, creative thinking, and teamwork, are united by an underlying purpose to make a positive impact. This powerful lesson will resonate with me for years to come.

The speakers, sights, and ideas I encountered during my week have left a strong impression on me. I entered the week as an interested girl who often entertained the idea of entering public service. I left motivated, more open minded, and totally captivated by the fellow young people I met and the experienced ones I heard speak. Being able to spend time with our Military Mentors and commemorate our nation's military was a true highlight of the trip. Acquainting myself with this aspect of public service was truly eye opening, as I had a very limited understanding about service in the United States military. Beyond that, hearing from President Obama was truly moving. He spoke to us with recognition of how we were entering a pivotal moment in our lives. He asked us to remember the big issues of our generation and think about what service meant to us. And most memorably, he asked us to focus on what we can do, not what we can be. I hold that message close to me as I anticipate my next steps for college and beyond.

The greatest impression cast upon me by my peers was the breathtaking potential they had. I was humbled by their sheer knowledge and willingness to share ideas. Even more striking were the stories of their hometowns. Knowing the aspects of local background that drive a young person to be so interested in government expanded my understanding of our country. My take on the United States was expanded incredibly by learning from the experiences of others. An informal time that exemplified this was the late evening discussions in the Mayflower Hotel mezzanine. Many of the kids that participated were seasoned debaters, but even their rhetorical skills were not as impressive as the overall tone of the event. Delegates would come to grab a seat and just listen for the sake of hearing another viewpoint or chime in to expand on another person's ideas. Frankly, moments like those made me extra proud to be part of the USSYP 2015 delegation.

The entirety of Washington Week was a dream. The Hearst Foundations went above and beyond to make the experience of the delegates truly unforgettable. From a glowing dinner in the Rotunda with the Constitution to a professional film and photography crew documenting the trip; an unparalleled lunch at the State Department to meeting our own senators, every moment was a privilege I literally could not have dreamt up myself. Every moment of the trip surpassed my imagination. The delegates and military mentors I met, the speakers I heard from, and the places I visited have created a unique understanding of public service in this nation. I could not be more grateful for what I have learned and experienced.