

Mariah A. Stewart, DC - 2015

Washington Week began on a Saturday.

I didn't have to travel far for Washington Week, because I live here in the nation's capital.

I was excited and anxious that morning; excited about the opportunity to meet students that applied and were chosen from all across our country, and anxious about not knowing if these students would be friendly to me. I knew there would be a lot of interesting questions and comments about my city and jokes about our lack of voting representation in the Senate.

The first meeting with the other 103 delegates and our Military Mentors was a little bit overwhelming. After dinner; we split up into our groups for the week, this gave me a better view on which individuals I would interact with most. I had often wondered about my roommate. What state would she be from? Would we be a good match?

Honestly, I couldn't have asked for a better roommate. I hope I am as lucky in college! We had a very busy itinerary daily but I was able to talk with the other delegates about their home states, hobbies, college and career plans. Washington Week was filled with so many first experiences. We went to the White House and met President Barack Obama. I shared the honor of placing a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery. I had never visited the World Bank; our tour was very informative. The U.S. Capitol was my favorite tour. The architecture, historical art work and the awesome tour guide made the experience great. One of the tour guides could speak many languages; he was very impressive. My favorite speaker of the week was Senator Joe Manchin (D-WV). I enjoyed his talk with the delegates. He asked us to consider that "in order to move forward in life, your priorities must be based on your values." We had many wonderful speakers throughout the week. The most influential non-keynote-speaker was my Military Mentor Lieutenant Colonel Ariel Batungbacal. We had many group discussions, but she made time to speak with me. She talked about her education and military career and I discussed my college and career plans. Her advice to me was to "remember to pursue a path of your own choosing to ensure your happiness." I started Washington Week with an open mind and heart. I planned to proudly represent my city and to enjoy this special opportunity. I did not expect to end the week with so many new ideas and friendships. The delegates had a great time together and created hash tags for some of our daily accomplishments. I am sure many delegates felt heavy hearted leaving new friends and a city full of adventure. This experience will not be forgotten soon.

I am very thankful for the opportunity to serve as the Washington, D.C. delegate. I learned so much about the government and myself. Washington Week will always hold a special place in my heart. Thank you.