

Ian Descamps, MT – 2015

In the one week in March of 2015 where I lived at the Renaissance Mayflower hotel and my schedule centered on high ranking government officials I learned more about life than I did the first three years of high school combined. Initially I would describe the speakers and the relationships fostered there as inspirational, but it doesn't quite capture the mood of my week. Redefining — this adjective represents my week. Since 8th grade I've had a focus for my life, to create legitimate change in people's lives through teaching. I established a strong foundation for this goal over the past five years, mainly through contributions from inspirational teachers and mentors. Washington Week provided exceptional speakers that added to that foundation of my future, and altered my vision ever so slightly to encompass a wider array of possibilities to help people through education. In essence, my experiences redefined my interpretation of my aspirations for my life—a redefinition I consider both consciously and unconsciously every single day.

I could lie and say I have a favorite speaker, or even that I consider a small few my favorites; in reality I loved far more than few, but each of those speakers shared a single thread that solidified them in my mind as fantastic. These speakers spoke to us and not at us; these speakers presented a new perspective on issues and on life; these speakers spoke from experience and without the filter of an ulterior motive. The remarkable ideas and astounding intelligence of these speakers saturated my experience, and I couldn't be more grateful. From the simplistic ideas on respect of Secretary Julie Adams to the legitimate sincerity of Senator Joe Manchin III to the infectious enthusiasm of Dr. Michelle Thaller and Administrator Charles Bolden to the dedication of Dr. Jim Yong Kim to the casual wisdom of Major Garrett to the philosophic intelligence of President Barack Obama to the relatability of Senator Susan Collins and Senator Cory Gardner, these speakers were superb.

On a fundamental level, the reasons why these speakers were my favorites remain the same, but the impressions they left differ. The combination of President Obama's words and Dr. Thaller's and Administrator Bolden's enthusiasm opened my eyes to the difference between educating and a teaching job while both would accomplish my goal of changing lives. The compassion of Senator Manchin, the integrity of Senator Collins and Senator Gardner, and the outside perspective of Major Garrett altered my ideas on civil service and our government. The casual interaction with Dr. Kim's intelligence left me astounded with the World Bank, left me almost with a romantic notion of the institution (which was not one of Dr. Kim's intentions). Secretary Julie Adams spoke with such clarity and respect for us her words resonated with me. Even the speakers that did not straightaway leave an impression left me with a new perspective.

In first three years of high school I learned mostly stock information that might prepare me for my future with underlying life lessons one had to seek out; this program educated me more than those three years of school. These speakers taught me about life. As I prepare to venture out into the world and carve my niche in a small liberal arts college (in a yet to be determined part of this country) I will constantly fall back on the ideas I gathered and reinterpreted in Washington D.C. I will always look back on the week I lived at the Renaissance Mayflower and smile.