

Curtis Leonard, SC – 2015

I remember walking in the Dulles airport terminal with shaky hands, and heavy breaths. Anxiety was expected and very prevalent on the first day; however, this only lasted until I actually started to meet people. With every introduction, hand shake, conversation, and hug, a morsel of stress was alleviated from my chest. Since I happened to be one of the youngest delegates and my political experience was somewhat lacking (my one-time awkward eye contact with Bobby Jindal dwindles in comparison to kissing Joe Biden or meeting President Obama), I assumed I was going to be way out of my league.

When I started to meet people, I felt surrounded by similar political nerds. (People here actually laughed at my William Howard Taft joke.) I was a big fan of the camaraderie and the blossoming relationships. I also found very fitting that Senate Historian Don Ritchie spoke to us about the importance of relationships between Congress and the president. His wise words had a great impact on me, for they not only focused on political events but they could be interpreted to represent the importance of working with others in the real world, cooperation and friendship. I found it ironic that the topic of discussion was the importance of strong relationships in life when I knew that I had just made lifelong friendships and relationships with many of my other delegates.

Two of my favorite speakers were President Obama and Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer. Meeting President Obama was somewhat euphoric. Being in the presence of the leader of the free world made my knees weak. President Obama told us to "worry less about what [we] want to be, worry more about what [we] want to do." This quote really stuck with me for a few reasons. First off, I knew I was going to be able to utilize this on my college application somehow. Secondly, President Obama made an amazing point. It makes sense to worry more about the results of your actions rather than the journey to get to those actions. I thought he was very well spoken (unsurprisingly) and he was even taller than he looks on television. Justice Breyer also gave us excellent advice on how to be successful in life. He said it is important to see the best in people, have a good sense of humor (at times), and to take the initiative to participate whenever possible. His long lasting advice is something that will likely linger in my thoughts for the rest of my life.

I am definitely going to miss the intense political debates on the mezzanine, the cuisine, and the people. Almost every night, a friendly, heated debate broke out with 104 of the most politically active teenagers in America. That being said, it got pretty heated. I enjoyed seeing the radically different views of people because it helped me realize how extremely eclectic people's beliefs can be. Another thing that was eclectic was the food. Every night we had something different. The only thing every meal had in common was deliciousness. I think all 104 of us are going to remember the white chocolate capital dessert for the rest of our lives. The last day was rough. I was very sad when I had to leave 103 of the greatest people I have ever met. I know that this was not "goodbye" but merely "see you soon." Our paths will likely cross again in the future, and I look forward to encountering all of the wonderful people I have met, again. The connections I made were genuine, and the advice I received from all of the really successful seniors will help me follow their footsteps during my senior year.

I remember leaving the Myrtle Beach airport terminal with a sense of fulfillment and a sense of emptiness. I felt fulfillment because I had just experienced the greatest week of my life with the greatest people in the world. I felt emptiness because Washington Week was actually over. One thing is for sure, the fulfillment was much more ardent than the emptiness. I know that Washington Week will be something that will stay in my memories for the rest of my life, and I know that going to Washington Week changed my life for the better.