

Adrien Inman, WV – 2016

*What a week.* When thinking of my time spent in Washington, D.C., the phrase 'wow-factor' is the best way I can describe it. It wasn't just getting to meet President Obama, or Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, it was far more than that. When I think back to that week, I begin thinking about the people that went with me, who were so accepting, no matter how different of a political view they held. The one hundred and three delegates were some of the smartest people I met, and I will never forget the conversations, the debates, and yes, the occasional argument that I shared with my fellow delegates. I miss that wild, wonderful week, and I miss the wild and wonderful people with whom I got to share it with.

But the greatest part about getting to be surrounded by amazing people, is that now you have amazing people to share experiences with. That week, we met with many people. From journalists, to senators, all the way to the very president himself, we met with some very important people. I will never forget sitting in a chair, furiously scribbling away in my notebook, just trying to keep up with the current speech, and then looking up, and seeing one hundred and three people just as captivated as I was. I will also never forget going to see the James Webb Space Telescope, and just having my mind blown at the sheer size of the telescope, and watching a hundred and three other delegates marveling at it also.

Out of all the experiences we shared together, the most lasting impression of this week came from a single moment. We were in the Newseum, on the second day, and I was walking around with some of the other delegates. We had no idea what each other's name was, nor where they came from, nor who they were as people. But, while walking through the area of the Pulitzer Prize winners, I was absolutely awestruck at the intelligence and curiosity of the group surrounding me. We would stop at a picture, read the caption, and then immediately jump into an intelligent, thoughtful discussion about what we just looked at. There was no need for introductions or small talk; we were already at home with each other on just the second day.

The second most lasting impression I carry from this week came from the powerful words of President Obama. He said, "Worry less about what you want to become, and more about what you want to do." That meant a lot to me. For the past few years, I have always focused on what my occupation would be. I have stressed about what college I will attend, about what degree I am going to get, and not about what really matters. I now realize that I was too narrow in my approach. Now, after hearing those words, and being surrounded by people who are planning to be dedicated to a life of service to others, I am filled with hope for my future and for the future of this country, for we are in good hands.

Washington Week was a week of memories. It was a week of stories to be told. It was a week I will never forget. I will always look back on this week as one of the most fulfilling experiences I have ever had. I want to thank all who made it possible, from the program directors, to the photographers, to our bus drivers. Without each and everyone one of you, this week would never have been accomplished. I wish to thank The Hearst Foundations for the scholarship, which sometimes I forget about because the week in Washington is such an overwhelming experience. And lastly, I wish to thank my fellow delegates. This week was made possible by The Hearst Foundations, but it was enriched by us. I am so thankful to have met all of you, and I can't wait to debate with each one of you again. Who up? We, the United States Senate Youth Program Class of 2016, are.