Kyelee Fitts, DoDEA – 2016

At one point in that useful journal, I doodled a little clock with the caption: “Time rules our lives. Every second is filled.” If that doesn’t sum up USSYP, I don’t know what does. Our days started early—five am or so—and ended at 11 pm curfew. We were hurtling from place to place, event to event, speaker to speaker, so fast that we could barely catch our breaths.

We had the times of our lives.

We did some amazing things. Short of a being a dignitary from another country (like Justin Trudeau, for example), I doubt anyone could have gotten as complete of an experience of Washington, D.C. in such a short amount of time. We saw the National Symphony Orchestra, we visited the Capitol. We saw Goddard’s James Webb telescope and the State Rooms of the White House on the very same day!

We ate some amazing food. I can’t possibly pay homage to the trip without mentioning the food. We had breakfast in the Grand Ballroom of The Mayflower Hotel. We had lunch in the State Department and at the Anderson House. We had dinner at the National Archives Rotunda. Dessert alone—recalling the magnificent white-chocolate raspberry cheesecake model of the Capitol—would make the trip worth it.

We heard some amazing words. Senator Cory Gardner of Colorado told us never to act like we belong, because we do belong. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg told us her role model was Nancy Drew. President Barack Obama told us to focus on what we want to do, not where we want to go. Senator Mazie Hirono of Hawaii encouraged us to try things that make us uncomfortable, because that’s the only way we’ll ever grow.

In the words of my personally favorite talk from NASA researcher and former astronaut Piers Sellers, “I highly recommend it.”

But beyond a doubt, the best part of the trip was the delegates. They were the ones who made time really fly. USSYP has been the only time in my life where I could literally sit anywhere on a coach, at a table, in the mezzanine, and find a new friend, an interesting perspective, and a great conversation. From the business management of Alaska Air to the inevitable debate about “soda,” “pop,” and “coke,” our insanely different backgrounds meant every second I learned something new. Throughout the week, the combined energy of 103 intelligent, accomplished, enthusiastic delegates was palpable. It was quite frankly intoxicating.

I learned more in this week about who I am and what I’m capable of than I have in years of school. Every second was another lesson learned, and the most important lesson of all: every second is precious. Seeing and hearing from such inspiring people, from guest speakers to military mentors to USSYP staff to delegates, meant that every one of us became more determined to realize our own dreams. We’ve been shaken and stirred into action. USSYP allowed each of us to hear the ticking of the clock ever clearer.

USSYP filled every second of our lives during Washington Week. I know I’ll never be satisfied with unfulfilling seconds ever again.

If you’re a future delegate, congratulations! Get ready for the time of your life. If you’re a USSYP administrator and/or employee, thank you so much for an unforgettable experience. If you’re a 2016 delegate, I know we’ll see each other again soon. To anyone else reading, don’t be surprised when future employers/presidents/officials ask each other, again and again: “Who up?”