

Eli O'Brien, RI – 2017

Reflections on Washington Week

Washington Week was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. Not only did I have the privilege of seeing the capital of our nation up close and personal, but I also got to see it with group of truly inspiring people. Within minutes of my arrival at the airport in Washington, I began to see how great my fellow delegates were. I felt I was learning something from every conversation I had, starting the first night when all of the delegates gathered in the Mayflower's Grand Ballroom after dinner. We played icebreaker games, discussed politics, and had some fun while we were at it. This opening night set the tone for the week as a whole. Washington Week was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be surrounded by people from all parts of our country, spanning the whole political spectrum, and learn from each and every one of them.

Speaking with other delegates was just the beginning of what I gained from this unparalleled opportunity. Each day, brought a full schedule of impressive speakers of which my favorites were Mark Shriver, Chief Justice John Roberts, and Bob Schieffer. Each speech introduced me to a wealth of knowledge and provided encounters that I could only have experienced by participating in the program.

I thoroughly enjoyed Washington Week, both during the experience and as I look back on it fondly. The more I reflect on the week, the more I realize the impact that it had on me. Prior to Washington Week, I was beginning to feel disheartened in our political system. I saw a country thoroughly divided, with two sides that refused to make any compromises. I had tried to be a bridge between these two sides at my own school, but I didn't see any sign of it working. With these feelings swirling around my mind at the outset of the week, I anticipated similar lines being drawn amongst the delegates. My worries turned out to be unfounded. All week, people who were on completely opposing positions spoke about politics in an educated and civil manner. And, just as encouragingly, everybody got along like old friends regardless of personal politics. This spirit of bipartisanship and calm discussion made me believe in our system again. If we could all learn to sit and talk with each other the way that the delegates did, we could solve a lot of problems. Conversing with the other delegates made me believe in more than just our political system, it helped me to believe in myself a little more. I left Washington Week feeling like I could be a part of the solution someday.

Washington Week was an opportunity like no other. I learned more than I can put into words from all of the speakers, Military Mentors, and fellow delegates. I'll never forget my experiences from the week, the lessons learned, and the friends I made along the way.