

Neha Seshadri, MI – 2018

The moment I entered the Mayflower Hotel's Grand Ballroom for the first time is a memory that will forever be ingrained in my consciousness. Stepping into the room, I was immediately surrounded by 103 of my fellow delegates who came from every background and every corner of America. We were united, however, in our common desire to change the world. In that moment, we had boarded the ship that was to take us on the journey of a lifetime.

Washington Week afforded us the opportunity to hear from a myriad of awe-inspiring American leaders ranging from Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch to President Donald Trump. While every moment of the week was incredible, meeting Congressman John Lewis on the 53<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the Selma march was an experience that I will treasure for the rest of my life. I remember the hush that fell over the room, every pair of eyes eagerly watching the door for Congressman Lewis to appear. I remember the way he spoke, his voice carrying a message of hope against all odds. Congressman Lewis inspired us to stand up and follow his example, expressing that "when you see something unfair, unjust, you have an obligation to say something, do something". I remember shedding tears as I saw the man who had fought and given his life to give me the rights I have today. I remember thinking how if it weren't for Congressman Lewis, I most likely would not have been able to sit in a room with my fellow delegates, all 103 of us with diverse backgrounds hailing from every part of the world. In his concluding words, he instilled us with confidence, repeating "it's going to get better for all of us. We cannot give up before we get there." I remember the moment he stopped to shake my hand, looking me in the eyes and wishing me good luck in all my future endeavors. This experience offered me a chance to see living history and witness how our past continues to shape our future.

Meeting the leaders of our nation was incredible but my fellow delegates impacted me in ways that cannot be measured. From the long coach rides to late night storytelling on the hotel mezzanine, it was the conversations I had with my friends that I will always cherish. The items on our agenda were absolutely incredible but it was in between those items where I grew most as a person. While we may have come from all parts of the political spectrum, I did not encounter a single person who was not willing to genuinely listen to what others had to say. Senator Amy Klobuchar told us "courage isn't standing up by yourself to give a speech. It is standing next to someone else for the betterment of this country." Through this life-changing week, my 103 fellow delegates and I rose united as one entity to stand up for the future of this nation. I left Washington Week imbued with confidence and optimism for the outlook of our country. My fellow delegates are not waiting for the future to change the world. They already are.