

## **Zahra Dinkins, DC – 2025**

Growing up on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., I've lived at the intersection of politics, history, and activism. The January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection remains imprinted on my mind. From hearing the voices of participants in the insurrection right outside my window to having in-depth discussions over the state of democracy after the insurrection with members of my debate team and league, D.C. has instilled in me an intense appreciation for exploring the complexities of government. Simultaneously, my city has made me into a champion for advocacy. From participating in mock trials at district courts to speaking on social justice issues at embassies, D.C. has revealed to me the importance of harnessing the power of my voice and advocating for change.

Washington Week forever changed my life because it completely transformed my passion for advocacy and commitment to exploring the complexities of government.

From Day 1 to Day 8, I learned not only about myself but about the world we are living in. I built long-lasting friendships, had uncomfortable but necessary political conversations, and learned from some of our country's leading changemakers. The impact that the experience has had on me simply cannot be put into a page. But, I can share some of my most memorable parts.

Hearing from the Librarian of Congress, Carla Hayden, was memorable because of her ability to break down barriers. Carla Hayden is the first Black woman to serve as Librarian of Congress. Carla Hayden's ability to soar over stereotypes and not cede to discrimination has shown me the power of perseverance.

Hearing from the Deputy Ambassador of Mexico to the United States, Ana Luisa Fajer, was memorable because of her position on improving foreign relations. Ana Luisa Fajer explained the importance of working together in talking about issues of immigration, tariffs, and drug control. Her belief on the peace and prosperity that comes from working together has shown me the importance of collaboration.

Hearing from astronauts from Crew 71 at NASA Headquarters was memorable because they embodied bravery. The astronauts, who recently returned from the International Space Station, spoke on their ability to work with astronauts from other countries while in space despite the political tensions between their respective countries on Earth. The astronauts' open-mindedness has shown me the value of seeing the beauty in difference.

Meeting Senator Cory Booker was memorable because of his positive spirit. As D.C. does not have Senators, I was not expecting anyone to be there for me at the Senate Reception. Not only did Cory Booker sign my certificate and take a selfie with me but he also took the time to ask me as well as some of my fellow delegates personal questions and take a group picture with all of the delegates. Cory Booker's genuine kindness has shown me the importance of leading with care.

Hearing from the Chief Communications Officer of World Central Kitchen, Linda Roth, was memorable because of her belief in helping others no matter the politics. World Central Kitchen's mission of serving safe and culturally conscious meals to people in need around the globe is especially inspiring, for people will travel to some of the most dangerous and war-torn places in the world to provide people with the basic human right that is food. The pure acts of selflessness by World Central Kitchen has shown me the value of commitment and civic-mindedness.

I've seen the monuments. I've seen the museums. I've seen police escorts for important politicians. What I had not seen is the way 104 young people from across the country and beyond, from all different walks of life, could come together and unite under a common goal of improving our political climate and society writ large. That is what Washington Week taught me. We are stronger together. We are stronger when we value diverse perspectives. Washington Week showed me the power of unity, and for that I will forever be grateful. Thank you USSYP.