

Diego Cabanillas, NY – 2026

Washington Week was the most life-changing week of my life. From the moment I sat down in the Amtrak, I felt a new sense of belonging I had never felt before.

It was amazing to tour the Pentagon, sit in the Supreme Court, eat lunch in the National Archives, and explore so many other historical landmarks. I personally wish we had more time in each of the museums. I felt bad running off from my fellow delegates to try and explore every nook and cranny, but I hadn't seen the inside of a museum since before COVID so I couldn't contain my excitement.

But this experience wouldn't be half as memorable without the interactions I had with my fellow delegates. Every time I think of the Russell Senate Office Building, I'll remember having conversations about ice cream with Anna. I'll remember killing my arms in a workout with Jared in the Mayflower gym. I'll remember seeing the amazing photographs uploaded to PhotoShelter and seeing who got "clipped" after each day. Learning about different slang terms on the train ride to Washington. The conversations around each table with new delegates and Military Mentors each day, ranging from careers and gratitude to songs and different types of feminism. Watching everyone recreate poses from paintings, starting in the Smithsonian American Art Museum and continuing until the last day. Or watching Zev rally everyone to get the perfect photo with J.B., allowing a joke from the first day to come full circle. And staying up for most of the last night to hug everyone goodbye as they left the Mayflower.

The sense of camaraderie was one I felt on the very first night but only grew stronger as I became part of the "Barber Shop" and chanted "Ooooh, ahhhhhh, OOO RAA!" on coach 3. I loved seeing every delegate taking pictures on different cameras and writing or drawing in their notebooks, each finding their own unique way of capturing a piece of the week to carry with them. Each finding their own most important details or quotes from the guest speakers. There was so much diversity of perspective in every conversation, but I didn't meet a single person who didn't make me feel like I belonged. I felt heard and seen at every step of the way. Every day I felt overwhelmed in the best way possible. I felt excited to meet new people. To learn and grow alongside others. To be inspired and gain new hope for our futures. I haven't stopped feeling that way since Washington Week.

Thank you to the Military Mentor team and to all 104 delegates for inspiring me. Your passion and kindness came through in every conversation, every game, and every meal and coach ride in between. It was an honor to meet you all and a privilege to call myself your fellow delegate.