

Catalina Gutierrez, TX – 2026

“Hacerlo Mejor” — Do Better

One phrase. One motto I live by every day: *Hacerlo Mejor* — “Do Better.”

Washington, D.C. was once a place I only dreamed of stepping into. I have always been fascinated by politics, the inner workings of government and how policy can shape people’s lives including my own. Growing up in a border city, I have seen firsthand how decisions made at the national level can ripple through communities shaping opportunities, resources and futures. Being selected as a delegate for Washington Week was an incredible honor but it carried even deeper meaning as a Hispanic student and the first person from El Paso to represent not only my city but also my heritage. In that moment I understood that everyone’s voices, perspectives and experiences are essential to the national conversation. This program strengthened my commitment to serve, lead and make a positive impact for both my community and those who come after me.

My interest in public service and leadership sparked at a young age particularly during the 2016 presidential election. I remember sitting in front of the television watching the candidates’ debate listening as they shared their visions for the nation. I felt a mix of curiosity and uncertainty as they discussed laws, education, healthcare and social issues. That early exposure awakened a passion in me, a desire to understand the systems that shape society and to be part of the solution. From that moment I became determined to learn, engage and ultimately contribute to the betterment of my community and country.

In May of 2020, my perspective on life deepened in a personal way when my uncle passed away. He was the kind of person who chased his dreams fearlessly and stood up for what he believed was right. Before he passed, he left our family with a simple but powerful message: “Do better.” At the time I did not fully understand what he meant but as the years passed those words became a constant source of motivation in my life. He had written them on a chalkboard at my Niña’s house, a quiet yet enduring reminder to never doubt ourselves, to embrace challenges and to strive for growth even in the face of adversity. Today those two words guide me pushing me to be the best version of myself in every moment, in every decision and in every outcome.

One of the most impactful moments of Washington Week was attending the NASA event where former NASA Administrator Charles Bolden spoke about the importance of humility in leadership. His message was simple yet profound. True leadership is not about recognition but about service and the willingness to grow continuously. He emphasized that even in positions of great authority, leaders must remain grounded and focused on their purpose and committed to making a positive impact on others. Hearing this as a student delegate surrounded by peers who shared a passion for making a difference in our nation made his words even more meaningful. It reminded me that leadership is not measured by power or prestige but by the tangible ways we lift others and improve the communities we serve.

Visting the Supreme Court and hearing from Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson was a huge highlight during Washington Week. Walking through the halls of such a historic institution was awe-inspiring but having the opportunity to hear directly from Justice Jackson made the experience deeply personal. She spoke about integrity, perseverance and staying true to one’s

values even when faced with challenges and adversity. Listening to her reflect on her journey and the responsibilities of interpreting the law gave me a deeper understanding of the role the judiciary plays in shaping our nation. It was both inspiring and enlightening, reinforcing my interest in law and reminding me that meaningful change requires dedication, resilience and a steadfast commitment to justice.

To "*do better*" means to remain humble, to recognize that growth is a lifelong process and to seize every opportunity to improve. Throughout the week, whether engaging in discussions with student delegates from across the country, asking questions during panels or reflecting on the historical significance of the institutions I visited, I realized that meaningful change begins with individuals committed to learning, serving and leading with integrity. Each interaction, each experience and each conversation became a reminder that leadership is not just about ambition. It is about empathy and the courage to serve first.

As I look toward my future in law and public service, I carry this motto with me. *Hacerlo Mejor* is more than a phrase. It is a commitment to lead with purpose and passion, and to continually strive for excellence in every aspect of my life. It is a reminder that our actions matter, that our voices have power and that each of us has the potential to leave a lasting impact on our communities and our nation.

No matter where life takes me, I leave everyone I meet with this simple phrase. *Do better*. To learn more, to serve more, to grow more. To challenge ourselves, push beyond comfort and strive for meaningful change. Every step of growth, no matter how small, brings us closer to the leaders and the society we aspire to be.

Hacerlo Mejor is not just a call to action. It is a way of life, and it is a promise I intend and encourage to uphold every single day.