

Daniel Green, IN – 2015

Although I've spent several hours pondering what I might write here, I still cannot find adequate words to describe one of the best weeks of my life. The entire experience, from initial application to final departure, was an emotional crescendo with every moment as thrilling and memorable as the last.

Selecting only a few highlights of the week was no easy task. After scouring my notes, sifting through the brochures, and admiring countless pictures, I concluded that every single activity was remarkable. The schedule was filled with once-in-a-lifetime opportunities to meet interesting people and visit exclusive venues. However, there is one location that will stand out as my favorite for as long as I live: the Department of State. I distinctly remember being incredulous as to whether I was really there; it felt like a dream. The Diplomatic Reception Rooms reminded me of a European palace, decorated with opulent furnishings and radiating grandeur. I'm pretty sure I shed a few tears when I saw the desk on which the Treaty of Paris was signed.

In addition to the Department of State, I really enjoyed visiting Mount Vernon, NASA, and the World Bank. Saying the pledge of allegiance in front of George Washington's tomb was a truly emotional moment for me. The speakers who captured my attention and heart the most were President Obama, Dr. Jim Yong Kim, Justice Breyer, and Senator Manchin. Again, I felt like I was dreaming as the president walked into the room. It's still indescribably surreal to think that I was only ten feet from the president of the United States! Dr. Kim was the speaker with whom I connected the most. His noble actions in Africa to improve accessibility to medical care is exactly what I want to do, so it was reassuring to learn of someone else who shares my interest.

While all the activities and speakers were wonderful, my fellow delegates and the Military Mentors are who truly made the week unforgettable. It amazed me how friendly everyone was. I am convinced that I will never again be in the company of so many brilliant young people with such astounding potential. I made friends who I will cherish for years to come, and I look forward to celebrating their future accomplishments. I constantly marveled at how down-to-earth the Military Mentors and other delegates were. With such glittering resumes, one might think they would be clouded with arrogance, but I didn't meet a haughty face all week. The Military Mentors, especially Captain Deed Ziegler, provided an atmosphere of both order and fun throughout our stay in Washington. The program would not be the same without the contributions of all of the Military Mentors who taught me so much in so little time.

Washington Week was the best week of my life. The words I've written here will never do justice to all I experienced that amazing week. There are still countless stories and people I want to mention, but my entire reflection could easily fill a small book. Even when boiled down to the bare bones, my experiences as a delegate to the U.S. Senate Youth Program transformed me in ways I will appreciate until the end of my days.