

Kudzai Kapurura, OR – 2019

Months before attending the program, a former delegate and friend of mine, Enrique Flores, was persistent in telling me how life-changing Washington Week would be. His descriptions were magical and colorful as his entire face would light up as he described the thought-provoking speakers, the delegates that turned into best friends, and even the delicious food. What I myself came to encounter surpassed the amazing descriptions of my friend. The United States Senate Youth Program changed my life.

As I boarded the plane with my co-delegate, Justin, we both headed to D.C. unaware of what we would encounter. We were nervous, excited, and so grateful! I did not expect to have my world changed in so many ways. Nevertheless, we travelled and kept one another company with lively conversation on the plane.

We finally arrived in D.C.! Once we were in the airport, we were met by a tall man wearing a suit who would be our security guard for the week. We excitedly followed him as he guided us to a black SUV where he took our luggage, and opened the door for the back seat, motioning us to enter. As we drove to the hotel, Justin and I giggled in the back in awe of having a security guard and being chauffeured around. As we sat in the back, we amusedly pointed out areas of the National Mall which we recognized from former trips to D.C. Just the trip to the hotel that night was filled with thrill as our realization of having arrived in D.C. truly began to settle in.

Upon entering the hotel, Justin and I were shocked at the beauty of our new home for the next week: The Mayflower Hotel. The ceilings were high, chandeliers hung through the center of the building in a straight line running through the lobby. Mirrors the size of walls decorated the building. The Mayflower is a museum in itself. Little did we know, our amazement of D.C. would only be increased throughout the week.

As the week progressed, our glee only grew as we met many powerful, passionate members of the federal government. I felt honored to have gotten the privilege to hear so many of the speakers not only speak, but answer our questions. We heard from numerous amazing people including: Supreme Court Chief Justice Roberts, Senator Blumenthal, ABC News Reporter Martha Raddatz, and most specially, Senator Merkley. We got to visit and tour beautiful, historic buildings including: The Pentagon, Capitol Hill, the National Mall, Mount Vernon, and even the White House. I truly believe that through meeting a diverse range of those who play a role in federal level leadership (from media to senators), I was able to gain more understanding and appreciation of the beauty of government.

The greatest impact on my impression of Washington Week was connecting with other delegates. I was surprised how quickly I connected with the other delegates after just one week. I made lifelong friends. Getting the opportunity to speak, hang out with, and bond with a humorous, intelligent, kind-hearted students was so inspirational. There is a bond that formed between us delegates that will never be able to be forgotten or broken. We danced together, laughed together, cried, debated, and toured magnificent places together. I will never forget my remarkable delegates. To the Hearst Foundations, the Oregon Department of Education, my principal Mrs. Tiffin, and everyone who made my participation in this program possible, I want to say a big thank you. I appreciate the memories, the inspiration, the scholarship, and the amazing experience. I am so thankful and so honored to have gotten the great opportunity to be a part of such an exquisite program.