

Inshira Bediako, TN – 2019

Washington Week

Throughout my high school career, I have debated policies with my fellow classmates and discussed international affairs at Model United Nations conferences. I know how a bill becomes a law and I have been engrossed in news stories about our senators and congressmen and women for years. Nothing could have prepared me to actually experience the inner workings of democracy and public service first hand.

Walking into the Supreme Court of the United States moved me to tears and left me in awe. In that room with the nine tall seats behind that imposing bench, the history of our nation was molded. For a few minutes in my day, I stood in the room where it all happened, and that is an experience worthy of a few shed tears. We also were able to hear from Chief Justice Roberts. This was especially exciting because the Supreme Court is one of the most, if not the most, elusive aspect of our government. Justices rarely appear in the news after they are appointed and the most the public usually hears from them is through their writings on the cases after the decisions. Through the chief justice, we were given a first-hand account into the process behind deciding on what cases to choose and actually debating the case and making a decision. We were also privy to the thoughts of one of the most brilliant minds of our legal system. This is an opportunity few will ever have and I am so grateful to have been one of the few.

There were many moments of this trip that are deserving of a thousand words of praise; however, I will focus on a select few that left a strong impression on me well after Washington Week was over.

The first speaker we heard from was Jack D. Warren at the Newseum, a Revolutionary War historian. To be honest, I did not expect much from him or his presentation. I left pondering my duty as an American citizen and as a human being in this increasingly interconnected world. The message that really stuck with me was about how it is our job to fulfill the ideals of the revolution. This was jarring because the Revolutionary War is something that I have always struggled with. It was a war fought on the principles of freedom and individuality and it was fought by brilliant men. It was also a war that actively promoted the enslavement of hundreds of thousands of people...my people. I have always known that without the Revolutionary War, I would not be sitting here enjoying the privileges of an American citizen. However, the privileges I hold were not first realized during the Revolutionary War. They were fought for by patriots who knew that the United States had a long way to go before the ideals of the Revolution were fulfilled. That is the point Mr. Warren was trying to make. America is not perfect, but it is up to us to correct the mistakes that our forefathers neglected. There were many other great points he made and others that I did not agree with. The main message was clearly taken to heart and to this day, when I become angry at the injustices perpetrated in this nation of "freedom and equality", I remember Mr. Warren's words and remember that I can be a part of fulfilling the revolution.

I was able to celebrate my birthday at Washington Week. This was obviously special as it was my eighteenth birthday, but it was made extra special by my Military Mentor. From the first day I met Lieutenant Commander Drewniak, I was pleasantly surprised by how super kind and sweet she was. She was always willing to help us with whatever problems came up. She also gave great advice and guidance for our life. During discussions, she asked thought-provoking questions that steered the conversation into interesting and sometimes heated, territories.

Lieutenant Commander Drewniak was truly special. On my birthday I was surprised with a birthday cupcake and the Lieutenant Commander gave me a beautiful birthday card signed by all the Military Mentors. It was a small gesture that left a huge impression on my heart. I was beyond touched and grateful for the kindness showered upon me that day. It was an amazing way to be ushered into adulthood.

Washington Week would not have been as memorable without my fellow delegates. The conversations I was able to take part in were mind-blowing and are still seared in my memory. On the first Sunday night during dinner, our mentor group engaged in a passionate debate concerning Electoral College reform. Multiple perspectives were shared and although no consensus was reached on the proper direction to take the Electoral College, we each left the dinner with a better understanding of the other side. I discussed topics ranging from universal healthcare and education reform. These conversations have shaped my worldview in more ways than I ever expected. I am now more empathetic to other perspectives besides my own. Before I was confined to my own little corner of the world, ignorant to the issues of states just a few hours from my home. Now I have met and interacted with people from all fifty states and even abroad. I have heard their concerns and learned about their worlds. With this information, I can make more informed decisions. My fellow delegates still continue to inspire me with all their accomplishments and their intelligence. I am very eager to see what they will achieve for this country in the future.

Washington Week was one of the best weeks of my life. I have gained some treasured memories and experiences which have already had an impact in shaping the person that I am becoming. I will carry these moments for the rest of my life.