

Snigtha Mohanraj, CT – 2024

I cried on the first night and then the last night, the reasons for both being complete opposites of each other.

After an exhausting day of traveling and then meeting over a hundred people in one instance, the first day was overwhelming. In many ways, I felt like I was drowning, and I found myself thinking, “why am I even here?” Some imposter syndrome hit me, making me question how I was ever selected to be in a program with some of the most talented individuals I have ever met. Some exhaustion really tired me out from socializing at night in the common areas. I felt flooded with so many emotions, with so much going on and with so many people around me all the time. Everything was new and not what I was used to. I was getting ready for bed, just trying to process where I was now, and then I let out a few tears. I was confused how I made it here and what to do with what I was handed. I was given the opportunity of a lifetime, and I wasn't sure how to make the most out of it. This feeling of not knowing what to do, it stressed me out so much.

The last night, the exhaustion from the week before fueled me instead of draining me. I was running on pure adrenaline, love, and excitement. If I shut my eyes for one second, my sleepiness may have caught up to me, and I would miss out on the last moments that I would have with some of the most amazing people of my life all together in one room. It was 2 AM, and I was doing handstands and playing card games, chatting with friends without any filter, and just bonding with the people I grew to love in only one week. I felt like I had direction in my life, something I used to be so scared of never finding. Although I still had no definite idea of a career path or even a college major, I started to figure out what I wanted my life to look like: serving others while surrounded by other caring and motivated individuals. What changed within just one week? To make me go from feeling overwhelmed and out of place to have found a home with 100 new people and a path for later in life?

On Sunday, we visited George Washington's Mount Vernon and the National Portrait Gallery. Although both places were both beautiful and filled with lots to see, the best part was the people I got to experience it with. Forming somewhat random small groups to travel in, I got to meet new people, enjoy art with them, crack jokes, and take tons of pictures. We bonded through our craziness (induced by our lack of sleep...) and simply enjoyed each other's company.

On Monday, we heard from Pete Buttigieg, an amazing speaker that engaged in such meaningful dialogue with us delegates. We heard from many other speakers, including Associate Justice Kagan, giving us such a rewarding day to learn so much from professionals. This was when I first realized that they are what I aspire to be like, even if I do not work in their specific profession.

On Tuesday, we toured the State Department and ate in the gorgeous Benjamin Franklin State Dining room. In the evening, we visited the National Archives and had the amazing opportunity of eating in the rotunda. I specifically remember taking so many pictures with my friends and starting to feel like a family after this day. Although it was an exhausting day, I felt so energized with my friends and dreaded having to go to bed.

On Wednesday, I had the amazing opportunity to introduce Dr. Richard Spinrad, the administrator of NOAA. Speaking in front of everyone was a daunting task, but the honor of introducing a role model was exhilarating. This day was also our Senate Reception event, giving us the opportunity to meet our senators and spend more time with each other.

On Thursday, we had various engaging activities, but I must admit that everything was overshadowed by what happened in the evening: watching the State of the Union Address from the White House and meeting President Joe Biden afterwards. Words cannot express what an honor this was and the pride I had every time I got to share this experience with others.

Friday was our last day together. We visited the Pentagon, engaged in meaningful conversation, and heard from amazing speakers, but hidden in the back of my mind the whole time was that this whole week was going to be over so soon. We had our delegate dance at night, signaling the near end of Washington Week. I kept hugging everyone around me, passing my notebook around for everyone to sign, dancing until I was drenched in sweat, and saying whatever came to my mind to my friends. We all took so many pictures, but they still cannot recreate the joy of being around everyone.

I miss everyone so much and cannot wait for our paths to cross again. After this amazing week, I realized that there is so much to achieve in life. So much to work for, so much to have, so much to value. Although it hurt for the week to end and to leave my friends, I knew that all good things must come to an end. But that doesn't mean that we cannot make more memories together, and I look forward to seeing the great accomplishments and endeavors my friends will achieve. Words cannot express how thankful I am for Washington Week.