

When I get up at 3:30 am, it had better be for a good reason. Little did I know, as I tried to wipe that sleep from my eyes so early that March 7, 2009 morning, that I was in for one of the best weeks of my life. The excited nervous feeling in the pit of my stomach grew from the moment my car's tires hit the highway. As this was my first trip to Washington, D.C., and only the second time I had ever been on an airplane, I knew that I would be in for lots of new and intriguing experiences. Thankfully, the plane ride was fast and smooth. Upon my arrival, I was greeted by a slightly intimidating, but splendid military mentor, and thus began my whirlwind Washington, D.C. trip with the United States Senate Youth Program.

I dove in head first Sunday morning, beginning with our group photo and then heading out to see the city and its amazing monuments. Experiencing some of the most important icons in our country was absolutely breathtaking! I would later find out that we had only just begun. My week culminated on Wednesday with a fabulous trip to the White House that included a visit with the President of the United States! But the day did not stop there; that evening was our annual reception with the senators. I managed to stay alive—despite crossing the line of death twice—and was blessed with the attendance of both of my senators. Somewhere in the rush, my hands were washed, but the feeling I got after shaking President Obama's hand will never be wiped from my memory.

All of the speakers I listened to and the places I visited were impressive, but as dazzling as they were, each of the friends I made stand out just as bright in my memory. From the first people I met at the airport, to my roommate, my group, and my military mentor, I will not be forgetting the impressions they made on me any time soon. I am also pretty sure that my taste buds will not be forgetting the amazing meals they were treated to! Looking back on all the unbelievable experiences I encountered, I am glad I got up at 3:30 that morning, because I would not trade the week that followed for the world!

**Lauren Geiger – MO**