

USSYP Essay
Anum Qadir- AK

To put the entire week in words is difficult, if not impossible. So here goes nothing:

Having arrived the day before almost all of the other delegates, I woke up the first day not knowing what to expect. I made my way down to the Colonial Room where a few of the delegates sat around one table. They were all so friendly and welcoming and were just as excited about being there as I was. Then we saw the agenda; museums, media people, U.S. Senators, Supreme Court Justice, White House Staff, and the President all in one week? Was it possible? According to Brian Lamb, even long-time D.C. residents had never done what we did.

After meeting a few alumni, a discussion group formed and kept growing. The topic jumped from federal versus state governments to abortion to the war in Iraq. The debate heated and, not wanting to make enemies the first night, I refrained from expressing my opinion. However, what was most significant was everyone's ability to turn around and calmly have dinner without any hostilities. This, to me, represented the week: the ability to hold different viewpoints on issues and policy and discuss them with such intelligent and formidable minds and still be friends at the end of the day. An opportunity like this was rare in many of our home states; I decided then that I wouldn't shy away from the next day's discussion.

To not mention the amazing speakers we had would be like a three-course Washington Week meal without all three courses. Even though we were pinching ourselves as Justice Sotomayor walked into the room at the Supreme Court, it was humbling to hear her say, "I'm still Sonia." There was an audible intake of air when President Obama came down the red carpet into the East Room but when he joked around with us, I realized he was still an ordinary, down-to-earth human being. This realization was prevalent throughout the week as we heard from so many people with such great influences on our country.

From Washington Week, we will all take away a new aspect of our national government along with ever-lasting memories and friendships. I am sincerely grateful to the Hearst Foundation and everyone who made Washington Week truly the experience of a lifetime.