

Olivia Prosseda-CO

When my guidance councilor handed me the application for the United States Senate Youth Program, I had no idea the papers in my hands would soon change my life. I spent hours working on my application and almost missed the deadline when I realized I was missing a signature on one of my recommendations, but luckily everything worked out and my application headed off in the mail just in time. After receiving a phone call telling me that I won the scholarship, I dug through my closet to find a weeks' worth of business attire and got ready for Washington Week 2010.

Arriving at Dulles Airport, two military mentors greeted me and introduced me to three other delegates who looked just as nervous as I was. After a short bus ride, all my nerves disappeared as I arrived at the Mayflower Hotel and was completely awed by where I would be residing for an entire week. I even called my parents to tell them that the bathroom had marble floors! I quickly realized Washington Week was not going to be an ordinary week; it was an experience of a lifetime.

The 103 other delegates truly made my experience in Washington D.C memorable. From the scream that echoed when the President entered the room, to the farewell dinner version of "Don't Stop Believing," every moment in Washington was defined by the people with whom I was surrounded. My military mentor kept the atmosphere light as we joked during dinner, and my roommate and I became friends as we bonded through *Friends* marathons on T.V before we went to bed each night.

The week reached its pinnacle on Thursday as we were escorted to the White House and met President Obama. Just as I thought the day could not get any better, we were driven to the Kennedy Center to eat dinner then watch a performance by the National Symphony Orchestra. Of course, the week was not defined just by meeting the President, but also by the excellent speakers who shared their knowledge throughout each day. I will never forget shaking Supreme Court Justice, Sonia Sotomayor's hand, or meeting the ambassador from India. Every day during the week was filled with unforgettable moments and incredible experiences.

Washington Week 2010 truly changed my life. From the 103 different perspectives I enjoyed throughout the week, to the brilliant assortment of national monuments and museums, and of course, the remarkable speakers, the week was a whirlwind but also completely unforgettable. When visiting Washington D.C, no one expects to run into the President, eat lunch with a senator, then take a tour of the capital, but during Washington Week that is exactly what a day could entail. The United States Senate Youth Program is the most outstanding program that any student interested in public service could hope to have as their foundation for their future.