

### USSYP 2010 Reflection

Finally, the wait was over. After months of grueling anticipation, the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) 2010 had arrived. The journey across the Pacific Ocean and continental United States was long to say the least, but even the vast distance from Hilo, Hawaii to Washington DC could not quell my excitement. My heart raced as the plane landed at Dulles International Airport. I was finally here.

Things only got better as we met the people that ran our country, and each person left an unforgettable impression. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor revealed her humble, caring soul as she casually talked to us while seated on a table and leaning on the backrest of a chair. The Senate Parliamentarian explained the enormous impact his decisions have on our nation, and he admitted that at times he is overwhelmed by his job. Even our president, Barack Obama, expressed that at the end of the day he always takes time to be a loving father to his children. I had never dreamed that I would meet such influential people of the world, let alone share question-and-answer sessions with them. Before this program I used to believe that Washington was a place occupied by tough-skinned individuals whom were indifferent to the American people. As it turns out, we're all human.

I also saw places that define our nation. All of the monuments we visited honored those that shaped our country, and I felt their presence at each location. Our three branches of government were also well represented during our program. The Capitol in all its glory symbolizes the strength of democracy. The Supreme Court embodies the need for justice in society. Thirdly, the White House exhibits the need for strong leadership for our nation to thrive. Our trip to Arlington National Cemetery reminded us to appreciate the life we enjoy today as free citizens. As the chilly rain dampened our faces and coats, we honored the brave men and women that sacrificed their life for the ideals of our nation. It was fantastic to witness the places that make our nation unique.

By far the most rewarding experience was meeting the inspiring delegates that define this prestigious program. At first, I was intimidated by all their intelligence and articulation. I soon found that they were all a bunch of sociable students anxious to learn about our nation, just like me. We all came from different states, backgrounds, ethnicities, and political beliefs. However, we all shared the common desire to create a better world for everyone. Granted, we did not agree on everything, but that did not stop our tremendous respect for each other. Friendships were formed across state borders, political values, and cultural differences. Each delegate had their own unique, unforgettable contribution to the group. We could discuss everything from healthcare reform and foreign policy to pop culture and regional slangs. Every single one of my fellow delegates inspired me to be a better person, and I can only wait to be reunited with them once again. We are all one *ohana*, or family.

If I could truly summarize the magnitude of the United States Senate Youth Program in words, I would do so now. However, nothing can truly grasp the remarkable moments that happened during this seemingly short week in our nation's capitol. All the combinations of words in my vocabulary do not do it justice. The keynote speakers gave us invaluable advice. The places instilled a greater sense of patriotism. Most notably, the delegates I met will always have a special place in my heart. This experience was amazing beyond belief, or in other words "*pretty cherry, brah!*"