

Josh Rubin – NY

First and foremost, thank you to the Hearst Foundations, to the staff, to the military mentors, to my fellow delegates and to all others who made Washington Week possible.

“I’m living in a dream I don’t ever want to wake up from,” said Justice Sonia Sotomayor as she reflected on her first few months as a Supreme Court Justice. These words perhaps epitomize the United States Senate Youth Program’s Washington Week 2010: Living in a dream.

No student from my school had ever applied to the program. No one had even heard of it, and when I received the UPS letter and package from the Hearst Foundations, I was stunned, awed, and humbled. As March 6 approached, I could barely contain my excitement: I looked at past years’ agendas, contacted one of last year’s New York delegates, and scrolled through the 2009 yearbook.

I entered the week with eyes, ears and a mind wide open, hoping to capture all I could in a short amount of time. The other delegates were nothing short of brilliant; the military mentors were role models for us; the speakers were engaging and inspiring.

The wide range of leaders we met represented all three branches of government (plus the fourth if you count the press like Brian Lamb does), all parts of the country and all parts of the political spectrum. Before Washington Week, I had never had the privilege of listening to such distinguished speakers in person. Now, instead of looking at politicians through a journalistic or media lens, I could now judge for myself; I could see that all of the political leaders were devoted public servants; I could see that they were all intelligent and hard-working, committed to their constituents; I could see that these larger-than-life figures were real people with genuine personal aspirations and convictions.

So, too, was the case with my fellow delegates. We were geographically, religiously, racially and politically diverse, from schools public and private, parochial and international. And while we disagreed on policy or on politics, we were still friends, and we still shared common principles and common goals. The American values which have so long sustained our country, unified our group: Within hours of arriving, many of us were openly debating the latest Supreme Court cases, healthcare reform and President Obama’s first fourteen months in office.

I wonder, as I write this, how we will look back in years to come and view these events of 2010. I wonder where we will all be in five, ten, twenty, fifty years. I can’t wait to find out.

When the week ended, I told myself that this was just the beginning. The week of a lifetime may have ended, but I hope that our experiences, our friendships, and our dreams endure.