

Bell, Sidney – UT

To try and condense any 168-hour period into a few paragraphs would be difficult; to try and condense Washington Week into a few paragraphs would simply be impossible. The entire week was filled with truly once-in-a-lifetime experiences, the kind you save in your memory to tell your grandkids. The highlights, then, are all I can fit into a few paragraphs.

Early on in the week, we had the privilege to meet with Justice Sonia Sotomayor of the Supreme Court. She waltzed into the room, cheerily greeting us, saying that rather than speaking to us, she wanted to speak with us. We then had an hour of Q&A with a Supreme Court Justice. I asked about the difference between justice and the law, others asked for advice or about her background. The experience was surreal. More than anything I'll take away, Justice Sotomayor simply seemed to glow internally. She carefully thought out everything she said, giving answers that truly befit a "wise Latina." Although I may not always agree with her decisions, I will always know that while she's on the bench, she is doing her utmost to make wise decisions for my country.

Among all of the days of Washington Week, Thursday stands out as one of the best days I've ever had. We met President Obama. He walked down the hall, all of us giving a little squeak of excitement. He then spent a few minutes talking with us and taking questions, telling us to "spend [our] time thinking about what we want to [do]." The day continued with dinner on the rooftop terrace of the Kennedy Performing Arts Center, all the lights of D.C. spilled out in front of us. Feeling on top of the world already, we had the opportunity to experience the National Symphony Orchestra perform a piece by Verdi. It was a flawless, exquisite performance. It was a magnificent way to end the day.

Between these experiences there were senators, secretaries, ambassadors and other officials; there were meals announced by Mr. Cox and dance parties at 2am, enjoyed among friends; there were bus rides with harmonicas and debates among delegates. No memoir of Washington Week will ever be entirely complete, but it can't even come close to complete without a mention of the delegates and the military mentors. These people came from all different backgrounds, with different views and ideas. They were driven, exciting, fun and witty friends. I made friends there that I won't ever forget, and met mentors that inspired me.

Washington Week was one of the most incredible experiences I've ever had. Many thanks go to the Hearst Foundation and the United States Senate for their support and preparation. Many thanks also go to my fellow delegates and to the military mentors for making the week so amazing. A simple "thank you" will never be enough for the grand adventure that was Washington Week 2010!