

Stephanie Fricke – Wisconsin – March 28, 2010

There is no doubt in my mind that Washington Week has been the most remarkable and enriching experiences of my life. The week left me with countless memories and friendships that will last a lifetime. Never in my life did I think I was going to shake hands with a sitting president, meet the newest Supreme Court Justice, and spend a week at the luxuriant Mayflower Hotel with 103 of the most incredible teens! I still remember that excited and nervous feeling in my stomach when I first arrived at the Mayflower Hotel and walked into a room full of strangers. However, it did not take long before I felt completely at ease and quickly realized that this week was definitely going to be one to remember.

It is impossible for me to pinpoint which speakers or events I liked the best, as they were all phenomenal. I will always remember anxiously waiting in the White House for President Obama to come take a picture with us and speak to us, and then feeling faint once he actually walked in the room! The entire week was filled with great experiences, from listening to wonderful and intelligent speakers, to touring the White House, the Pentagon, the Capital, and then even listening to the National Symphony Orchestra play at the Kennedy Center. Many of these experiences were things that most people can only dream of doing. How many people can say that they were part of a question and answer session, took a picture with, and shook hands with one of the Supreme Court justices? Every speaker I listened to and each event I took part in during Washington Week provided me with some type of lesson and inspiration for the future. Having the opportunity to hear and gain insight from people who have touched so many different lives, including my own, was really an incredible and moving experience.

To be completely honest, though, the best part of the whole week was interacting with and meeting all of the student delegates. I came into this week being very nervous about spending an entire week without knowing a single person. Looking back at the week now, I feel as if I have known some of the delegates all my life. The friendships I made are ones that will last a lifetime. The students at USSYP were truly some of the most determined, intelligent, motivated, compassionate, and friendly people that I have ever had the opportunity to meet. When I look back at pictures of the week, I cannot help but smile and think of all of the great memories and experiences we shared. Some of the greatest ones happened right in the hotel when we were just hanging out and getting to know each other. I am simply blessed to have met and spent a week with some of the most remarkable young men and women in the world. My week at USSYP was an unforgettable and absolutely unbelievable experience. I extend my sincerest thanks to all the members of the William Randolph Hearst Foundation, the coordinators, the military mentors, and all of the staff that made this wonderful week possible. It was truly an honor to be a part of such a memorable experience.