

USSYP Delegate Essay

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Looking back, I now realize it would have been impossible to set my standards too high for Washington Week because they would have been shattered on every level. Washington D.C. in itself is an amazing city, but what made it truly unique was the people I was surrounded by while I was there; it created an atmosphere I could have never imagined experiencing.

Coming from a suburban town in Arizona, I was completely blown away by Washington D.C. There was a glaring contrast between the city of Chandler, where the most historical building is less than one hundred years old high school, and Washington D.C., where everywhere I turned I was looking at a significant part of our nation's past. Driving past the monuments on my first night there, standing where Martin Luther King Jr. gave his famous speech at the Lincoln Memorial, and walking through the White House seemed so surreal. I was in the heart of our nation, and this thought still resonates within me even though I left over a month ago.

Still, even more significant than the places I was able to see were the people I was able to meet—my fellow delegates. Perhaps what surprised me most was how much we all had in common. Sure, we all had different accents, backgrounds, and of course political affiliations, but those distinctions were nothing compared to the bonds we all shared. I was surrounded by one hundred and four students who all had the drive and motivation to want to make a difference, and every single one of our speakers that week acknowledged that fact. After listening to President Obama, Chief Justice Clarence Thomas, and the countless other inspirational speakers talk about the necessity of bipartisanship and working together I realized how amazing it was for all of us delegates to connect in the way we did. There were heated debates and multiple clashes of opinions, but in the end we all left feeling like a family.

I would not trade my week in Washington for anything. Prior to this experience I was extremely conflicted about what I wanted to do with the rest of my life. Of course I had a love for politics and government, but I also loved math and science. I did not think there was a way to merge the two together, and therein lay my problem. After Washington Week however, I realized that it is possible for every single person to make a difference in our country. I do not have to pick between the two, because there is a need for people of all sorts of educational backgrounds in public service. That epiphany reflects the single most important lesson I took away from Washington Week—we as American citizens ought to utilize our talents in order to best serve our country, no matter what they may be. This sentiment was exemplified by every military mentor, senator, and public official I had the honor of meeting there, and they left me with the inspiration to follow in their footsteps.