

Jacob A. Sackett-Sanders – DE - 2011

More than a month later, the major moments of Washington Week are ingrained in my memory as a series of tableaux. I can see myself shaking hands with Justice Clarence Thomas, waiting with baited breath for President Obama to appear, and taking pictures with both of my senators. In my head there is the image of Director Panetta in all his fiery passion and of Secretary Chu's quiet brilliance, of Secretary Duncan's stalwart determination and of Brian Lamb's sobering town hall style talk. These things are the piecemeal parts of a uniquely amazing experience, a dream proved true by pictures and meticulous notes too detailed to be works of fiction. But looking back, and also looking forward to the years to come, they are not what strike me as most important.

I believe, rather, that it is the 104 individuals assembled from across the country and from across the pond that are most important. We were and are a hodgepodge of interests, a random sampling of viewpoints. Even to say we all shared an interest in a political career would be a stretched half-truth. We shared at best an affinity for things of a political nature—perhaps natural intelligence and dedication to public service as well. Our group was crafted not only from future governors, bureaucrats, and senators, but also from future geneticists, professors, and businessmen. Diversity of political and philosophical thought was only as far away as the person one chose to sit beside. On paper we would have seemed a discordant union.

Yet it is the beauty of our group as a whole that still stirs me. During the week in DC we came together as future leaders, transcending ideological differences that might have kept us apart in other circumstances. We became close with a few, friends with many, and connected to all through our shared experience. At day's end we formed a cohesive group consisting of disparate individuals; a miniaturized version of the melting pot that our nation strives to be, and that has only made us stronger! Not tomorrow, but perhaps the day after, we will have our turn to impact the world and this group is one that should give each and every onlooker hope!

But again, more important than what we may represent, are the connections we have made with each other. Next year, our delegation will have matriculated to over 34 universities, from the old ivy covered colleges of the northeast to the warm hearted universities of the south. Our group will span from Maine to California. Our education will take place in over half of the states in our great union. And four years onwards, our delegation will only have become wiser and more global. We will become farther spaced geographically, but we will find the bonds formed by the United States Senate Youth Program as strong as ever.

Of this much I am sure. Washington Week was educational, but it is the delegates who were inspirational. It was an honor and a privilege to spend time with 103 gifted and talented individuals who will undoubtedly change the world. They will be what last in my head: their personalities, their words, and the brilliant exchanges that resulted from both. Further, part of me will rest easy knowing that I have 103 friends in this world that will pick up the phone should I call in ten years. That's the sort of mettle that our group is made of. We somehow became more interconnected in a week than months-long companions. And for that I am thankful. I sincerely hope it is a foreshadowing of what the world will look like when we are raised to power. A place of moderation, of unity, and of kinship.