

Robert Locke III - MA - 2011

I have had the pleasure of visiting, living, and working in our nation's capital, my favorite city in the world, on several occasions prior to my Washington Week experience. However, I could not really expect or grasp just how exciting, engaging, and motivating of an experience I would have at USSYP. Before I had even reached the District, I had the opportunity to ride in a "mobile lounge" at Dulles Airport, and meet and converse with some of my fellow delegates while we were delayed because of airline complications. I must say that was the most enjoyable delay I have ever or probably will ever experience because of the good nature of the conversations and the kind of people I was sharing my experiences with.

While Sunday, Monday and Tuesday were all filled with experiences I'll remember for the rest of my life, Wednesday was arguably the greatest day of my life and most emblematic of the experience I had in Washington. To have the ability to wake up in the historic Mayflower Hotel, where FDR wrote the historic words "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself", in and of itself is remarkable. To then have the ability to tour the White House and converse with Kal Penn (of House fame) before going to the Department of State is not an opportunity you have every day. I directly credit my visit to the Department of State for my decision to declare an International Studies major as I go onto the Johns Hopkins University this fall. My conversation with a top State Department official truly helped me realize how to exercise my diverse career aspirations going forward. And having lunch in the most beautiful dining room I have ever seen wasn't bad either. It's usually sad to have such a wonderful thing as lunch cut short but when you need to leave to be on time for the President of the United States, you do what you have to do. Once at the White House, words really cannot describe the feeling of awaiting the leader of the free world. I haven't cried many times in my life but having the President just feet away from me recognizing my own accomplishments brought me to the verge of tears of joy. Later on in the evening, I had the distinct honor of meeting both of my Senators, Senator Kerry and Senator Scott Brown, two of the most well-known and renowned Senators in the nation. It truly is incredible how enjoyable and charismatic both gentlemen are and to have their presence and recognition of our accomplishments truly meant the world to me and rounded out the most memorable day of my life.

As the final day arrived, and we visited Arlington National Cemetery, I couldn't help but think of the necessity of visiting Senator Kennedy's gravesite with my fellow Massachusetts delegate to pay tribute to the man who served my state and our country for nearly half a century. Little did I know, almost the entire USSYP group decided to follow suit. I believe that is the kind of cohesion that made us such a remarkable group and will translate into the cooperation necessary as we enter various government positions. The Kennedy family gravesites provide my favorite view of the Washington skyline. It was there, on that blustery Friday morning that I realized the magnitude of my experience and the amount of work that is left to do, finishing the work that people like Senator Kennedy started.

Washington Week was not only the ultimate validation and recognition of my past accomplishments but also an opportunity for me to realize my potential and provide me a much clearer sense of what I will have to do to instill the positive change I wish to help bring to the world. To Rayne Guilford and the entire USSYP staff, and our distinguished guests including Mr. George Irish and Mrs. Jeannie Irish, as well as my fellow student delegates who made the experience possible, thank you so much from the bottom of my heart. I sincerely look forward to working with you all in the future.