

Dylan Schaffer - RI - 2011

"I am small, I am tall, and that is all." This statement of ten simple words is one of the best memories and represents the entirety of a truly life-changing week. The entire collection of 104 delegates to Washington, DC had the chance to sit to listen to an audition of sorts—auditions to become the keynote speaker of the 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Washington Week—and anyone who was interested in speaking had to get up and deliver some type of address, about any topic, serious or comedic, in-depth or brief. The speeches, I thought, reflected the people giving them perfectly, as well as the entire collection of delegates. We heard everything from a solemn address on the holocaust to a humorous monologue on short-ness. Then in an act partly fueled by serious intention, but mainly from over-tiredness, one delegate got up in front of everyone to say those ten words. "I am small, I am tall, and that is all."

After hearing two speeches on height I thought that pithy statement was quite clever for something a delegate came up with at around midnight during a truly insane week. We were all exhausted at that point, and with good reason. We had a countless number of extremely unique opportunities that would be bragging points for our peers and history teachers alike. Tours of the Pentagon, the CIA, the White House, and the Capitol gave us an inside look at our government. The speakers we had the pleasure of hearing and interacting with really set Washington Week apart from the traditional sight-seeing trip to DC that everyone takes in eighth grade. Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas spent two hours answering questions before being told he had to move on to his next engagement. He talked candidly about his job in simple terms, and about what it meant to be a public servant, with experience in many different government jobs. He was one of the most interesting speakers and a personal favorite, which, as a staunch liberal, is saying something about this conservative justice. Ambassador Tan made me look at my own country in a completely new light and spoke to our group with respect and dignity, not only as a representative of the Turkish Republic, but as a person who cares about humanity as we do. Judge Robert Henry discussed judicial activism and court precedent, followed by an earnest talk about my personal college choices at our lunch table. President Barack Obama—who, we learned, actually exists beyond the TV screens and news headlines—discussed the present economy and foreign affairs, the future he sees for us as America's leaders, and even talked about his plane. Out of all of these amazing speakers and so many more, there were some common themes. All were awe-inspiring, with meaningful messages, candid conversations to us as if we were already our nation's leaders, and advice for the future as they pass the torch. They were "tall"—seemingly towering over us in intelligence and importance. But an important second theme was that they were people just like us—they were "small." Some even attended USSYP as high school students, stumbled at first in their careers, and lost elections. But they all had a love for their country and its people, just as we all do. "I am small, I am tall, and that is all."

So by the time those speeches came around on Wednesday night of our week-long adventures, we were all exhausted with good reason. But we didn't hesitate in taking advantage of our time together as fellow delegates and future friends. By the end of the week, I had the best Wisconsin-style, Boston-versus-Brooklyn, West-coast-surfer-dude, Southern drawl in the country. We met people not only from every state, but from every walk of life. Every religion, ideology, interest, socio-economic background, you name it. We were all there, in staunch contrast. Some of us were small, and some were tall. And we didn't waste a minute in discussing it with each other, learning from each other's experiences, upbringings, and even future plans. Dinner conversation consisted of everything from NCAA hoops to EPA regulations. From Quakerism to Quaker oatmeal to energy policy. We met with staunch contrasts, but by the end of the week, we left feeling that our similarities outweighed everything else. That surprisingly enough, USSYP could bring together people from across the nation in speech, informal discourse, and even jam session, through our common love for public service, education, and leadership. By the end, we were all both small AND tall.

Looking back, I suppose that ten-word statement in the heat of an exhausting moment meant a lot about the program we experienced and the people we experienced it with. I will take every single memory from this trip with me as I pursue my education, career, and life in public service. I will try my best to live up to our speakers' expectations, our program alumni's example, and our fellow delegates' competition. But most of all, I will always try to remember to be both small AND tall. That is all.