

Braydon Jones - TX - 2011

Washington Week is more than a scholarship, more than a week vacation to our nation's capital; it is a journey that would serve as a catalyst for an inspiration that will never burn out. "Only he who keeps his eye fixed on the far horizon will find his right road." I read this every morning and then yearn to focus on moral decisions and take the "right" road in life, which I have come to find much more arduous than the "popular" road.

Over the course of Washington Week, I transformed into the most selfless leader I could be. Leadership is a journey. I dedicate my journey to my fellow delegates, who were, without question, the future leaders of this country. From our first seconds in the Colonial Room of the Mayflower Hotel to our heartbreaking farewells, we became more than acquaintances, more than friends, but a true genuine family. Who would have guessed that I could be closer to a group of people that I had known merely a week versus people I had known for years? Nancy Erickson, the Secretary of the Senate, told us to "surround yourself with people who are smarter than you." It would be because of these leaders, the military mentors, and the program staff that I would embark on the lesson of a lifetime.

From the space between the Saturday I left and the Saturday I returned, I emerge with a sketch of my life rough and unrefined. As Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas stated, "I have spent my life preparing..." As leaders we all have successes and failures along the way, but, ironically, the times of weakness enable the person to become stronger. The smooth ride is comforting, but the bumpy ride gives opportunities to improve our imperfections and lead others in a more powerful way. Washington Week helped me pursue my aspirations, unearth my talents, beckon creativity, and revel in my future accomplishments. Why is this week so special? Washington Week is a place that breathes life into ideas. Washington Week is a place of rich cultural diversity. Washington Week is a place where open minds inspire self-discovery. Is it any wonder that the programs purpose is to help transform individuals into the thinkers, dreamers, and leaders of tomorrow? That's it. Washington Week's sole purpose is helping young leaders discover theirs.

My past and present accomplishments are merely "points-of-interest" on the lifelong journey down my "right" road. Senator Ben Nelson encouraged us to "Do what has to be done." I know that through my journey there will be difficult tests, but I know that without these tests I would grow weaker instead of stronger, and life would be a meaningless road leading to nowhere. Ambassador Namik Tan compared America as the "Land of Big Thinking." The 104 delegates that make up our family are the big thinkers of tomorrow. I thank the Hearst Foundations and their role of not only changing each of our lives, but also reveal their hope in us as the next generation of leaders with a common vision. After all, if you do not know where you are going, any road can you get you there. The 104 of us are not here "to be a part of history, but to make history."

Although Washington Week is over, my journey is not. I know that as I am following my path, my fellow delegates are discovering theirs as well and we can only keep traveling until our paths cross again. This is not the end. It's just the beginning. Through the molding and understanding of Washington Week I am convinced that if I continue to live in divine confidence as time slips by, the result will be ultimate triumph. As said by Ursula K. Le Guin, "It is good to have an end to journey toward; but it is the journey that matters, in the end."