

My Thoughts on Washington Week

I would like to start out by saying that Washington Week 2009 was the best week of my life so far, and that the Hearst Foundation and everyone else associated with Washington Week is to be commended. Without a doubt, I will remember the pure joy of Washington Week for the rest of my life, from the numerous speakers and tours to tremendous respect I gained towards my fellow delegates.

One speaker that made a distinct impression on me, besides President Obama, was Ambassador Patriota of Brazil. Upon looking at the schedule for the first time at the beginning of the week, I expected his presentation to be among the less interesting, mostly because I didn't quite grasp what his presentation would be about. I couldn't have been more wrong.

Ambassador Patriota provided a unique opinion from the perspective of an official representing one of the globe's rising powers. In Washington D.C., it's quite easy to fall into a bubble whereby U.S. policy constitutes the only policy. The ambassador provided a viewpoint from outside this bubble that demonstrated the feelings of the world outside the U.S. In many cases, Ambassador Patriota praised the U.S. government for its actions; at other times, he criticized. When he did criticize, however, it was in a respectful manner. Overall, Ambassador Patriota struck a perfect balance between praise and criticism that provided a healthy example of how one can disagree in an amiable way. More simply put, the ambassador was a fine example of how to politely debate and discuss.

The most valuable lesson I learned during Washington Week concerns the excellent military mentors that guided us through the week. They wholeheartedly deserve the utmost honor and respect. Upon learning more about the program as I progressed through the application process, I didn't know what to expect from the mentors. Once the week started, however, and I became familiar with Lt. Gullo, my mentor, and the other mentors, I quickly realized that these fine men and women were fun-loving, kind people. In other words, my experiences with the mentors humanized the military for me. Before Washington Week, I had had very little contact with military personnel, and I feared that they would be strict and unforgiving. Instead, I found the mentors amiable and incredibly polite. Though I held a high

amount of respect for the military beforehand, that respect grew even further as Washington Week progressed. The week wouldn't have been nearly as interesting and fun without the military mentors.

Washington Week will be an experience I will never forget, both for its valuable educational and illuminating content and for the outstanding new friends I made, among other things. I sincerely wish I could do it all over again.

Ian Rockwell - VT