

Vivian Wang - OH - 2011

So what was Washington Week? After returning to my high school I was asked this question hundreds of times. Was it the motivating speakers? The sumptuous meals with way too many forks and knives to keep straight? The exciting tours around Washington's best attractions? Or was it meeting 103 of the most amazing people in the United States? As I tried to think up an answer, I reflected on the past whirlwind of a week.

Immediately after exiting the plane, I was greeted by Captain Brownell and Erin Mosur, who promptly began snapping away with her camera as Aaron Burnside and I strolled down the hall of the Reagan National Airport. Soon after we were united with other delegates and then whizzed off to the luxurious Mayflower Hotel located at the heart of Washington D.C. The reality of my situation did not hit me until I went up to my suite, sat down on my oh-so-soft bed, and opened up my itinerary: President Obama, Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, CIA Director Leon Panetta, Secretary of Energy Steven Chu, Undersecretary of State Maria Otero, the list just went on and on!

As Washington Week continued, these names on the page materialized in front of me. I also got to know the other delegates from around the world. We played "ko-ah, ee-moo-ah" together, debated current issues together, shared funny stories from our hometowns together, feasted together, danced together, and learned together. It was amazing how quickly we all clicked. We may have been complete strangers prior to arriving at Washington, but by the end of Washington Week, we knew that the bonds we had formed with each other would last forever. I left the USSYP with a huge, crazy family of 104 of the nation's rising leaders.

After spending a week with the extraordinary delegates, speakers, and military mentors at the USSYP, I now have countless stories and lessons to pass on to my community. It was my honor and privilege to be chosen to attend such a remarkable program, and I cannot give enough thanks to the Hearst Foundations, Ms. Rayne Guilford, and all the other staff who made this week possible.