

Collegiate Presidential Inaugural Conference (Continued)

I also got to watch the political satire group, The Capitol Steps, as they performed a private show for us. I thought that it was really neat that they used music, song and dance as an outlet to deal with the stress that they are under in their jobs, and also comic relief/levity of some of the less than serious topics that are blown out of proportion by the media, relating to politics and the government.

But perhaps the most exciting part of the week was attending the inaugural ceremonies on the National Mall. I was about 500 yards from the Capitol Building. From where I was standing, amidst a sea of 823,000 other Americans who turned out to support the government, I had an amazing view of both the Capitol Building and the Washington Monument. We had exclusive early access to the Museum of Natural History, and were able to peruse the artifacts and exhibits at will. Once we left, however, we were amidst the people, the crowds, and the droves. As a military member, it was almost overwhelming to see that many people all gathered in one place, supporting a common goal and the government that the people have put in place.

I wish there were words that would, or even could adequately describe the atmosphere that was felt out on the National Mall that morning or while watching my classmates marching in the parade. While yes, it was cold, it could have definitely have been colder. And while it wasn't sunny, it could have been raining. In the scheme of things, we had a beautiful day (especially for the middle of January in Washington, D.C.) on which to celebrate the American spirit and the achievement of the American dream, which was started so many years ago. Having the opportunity to be there and a part of it, and celebrate the heritage but also the beginning of a new time in history was incredible, and one that I am so thankful that I had and utilized.

I also found it particularly inspiring to see that so many members of my generation would turn out to an academic summit. I think oftentimes I view my generation as lacking when I see people doing nothing with their lives. To a certain extent, it renewed my faith in my generation.

In our down time, we got out and explored some of the city, networked, and had quite a bit of fun. One night, none of us were 21 so instead of going out, we ran across the road to Baskin Robbins, bought quarts of ice cream, had twelve glasses sent to my room, and made ice cream sundaes and root beer floats. Or another night, I met up with a friend and her family, practiced Nerf gun shooting with her little brother, got my hair done by her little sister and even got an education on Star Wars. I can now honestly say now that I have seen Star Wars (big step for me...).

To top the whole week off, we attended an Inaugural Ball our last night in town. The ball gave us exclusive access to the Newseum, was catered by Wolfgang Puck, and even served Shirley Temples and other non-alcoholic drinks in fancy glasses. Anyone who knows me and my

aversion to dresses would have been incredibly proud of me for donning a gown for the aforementioned shenanigans. And though I may have had athletic shorts on underneath, purely out of spite for the dress, I'm pretty sure it still counts.

In closing, I owe the Academy a huge thank you for allowing me to go. I had the privilege of meeting some amazing people and figures, creating some magnificent memories from great times, and being a part of history. Without the grace of the Academy permitting me to go, I would never have met all of the great people I spent the week with, nor would I have had quite as excellent of an excuse to don my bridge coat in public.