If you are headed to Washington D.C. bring walking shoes! The only way to truly experience the grandeur of our nation’s capital is on the ground floor, with that said you’re going to be hoofing it. I thought I packed a pair of professional looking shoes that were also comfortable, however after some 100,000 steps +/- I was proven incorrect. Not to let my apparent lameness slow me down, I complained my way through some of the most incredibly breathtaking and awe-inspiring monuments our nation has to offer. Arlington National Cemetery, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall were etched in my memory and will not soon be forgotten. The experience left me with an overwhelming sense of pride for what this country has accomplished and the freedoms that were sacrificed for. This being my first time to the capital, I was enamored with the sights and I am sure it was evident to those around me. I will forever be grateful for the opportunity to experience Washington, D.C. Next time I will bring better shoes.
Giving Back Little by Little
Our discussion with the Peace Corps
by Ryan Garcia

On the last day of Seminar 4 in Washington D.C., the NM Agricultural Leadership visited the Peace Corps Headquarters. There we were welcomed by over 8 staff members from various units. We had brief presentations from Sonya Steins, Director of the Office of Overseas Programing and Training Support (OPATS); Gordon Mengel, Agriculture Specialist of OPATS; Claudia Kuric, Chief of Operations Support of OPATS; Lateefah Burgess, Director of Placement; Jessie Folk, Lead Technical Training Specialist of OPATS; Erin Lawless, Deputy Chief of Program and Evaluation of OPATS; and Chris Austin, Deputy Director of Congressional Relations. Each one of them explained their responsibilities and those of the office where they work, and shared something personal. Mr. Austin, for example, spoke about how he started at the U.S. Congress working for our very own New Mexico Senator Tom Udall. He said, “I had a good mentorship, because Mr. Udall was a fighter for the people of New Mexico and had great passion for rural Americans who worked and lived on the country side.” Ms. Burgess explained the specific requirements Peace Corps has for volunteers. She said that Peace Corps has over 7,000 volunteers, mostly in Africa where they help small villages, and six areas of interest where volunteers can provide help: Health, Education, Agricultural, Community & Economic Development, Environment, and Human Development. Each volunteer is committed to be with Peace Corps for 27 months, three of which are for the initial training. The training can be face-to-face or long distance. It helps volunteers to become aware of the different aspects of being in another country with no electricity or no potable water. I was very interested in the Peace Corps program because they are helping other countries that don’t have the assistance from their local government and are doing their best to help people live a prosperous life in their own lands. I appreciate Peace Corps allowing us to visit and be aware of what they do and how people get involved.
For the Living  
by Newt McCarty

Washington DC, what an amazing opportunity. Experiencing a week in DC for the first time was not just the tip of the iceberg, but more like a chip of the iceberg. It was truly overwhelming, with all there is to see and do, not to mention getting a taste of what it takes to keep our nation running. The history in the area is simply astounding and brings about a sense of pride in who we are and what we represent as a nation.

I cannot imagine a more humbling experience than the time we spent visiting the monuments and memorials. The opportunity to recognize and attempt to comprehend the sacrifices made for us, especially those at the Arlington National Cemetery, representing only a fraction of the souls given to protect our freedoms, and those that suffer oppression around the world is something I will never forget.

When it comes to dealings within our government, I think it is common for people to feel insignificant or unheard. I must say, when I first witnessed a small part of what goes on in our government, insignificant was not even close to how small I felt. To my surprise, as the week progressed that feeling began to change. Each day we had the opportunity to meet with individuals, agencies, state representatives and staff helping us realize that we, as individuals or groups of individuals, can be and are heard in Washington. In order for our stories, concerns, and desires to be heard, they must be told. I am glad to say there are people in Washington, D. C. who are listening.

We, as citizens of the United States of America, carry a debt to our founding fathers and those following in their footsteps who built this great nation we are privileged to call home. Our duty to them is to uphold and protect what they worked so hard and sacrificed so much for. While visiting the monuments and memorials, I read and stood in awe of every engraving or quote. One quote in the Lincoln Memorial particularly resonated with me.

“It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

Abraham Lincoln  
November 19, 1863