



**NCSJ STUDENT LEADERSHIP PROGRAM
Washington, D.C.
October 12-19, 2009**

PROGRAM REPORT

**Lesley Weiss, NCSJ Director of Community
Services and Cultural Affairs**

PARTICIPANTS

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY HILLEL

Josh Cook

Nira Lee

Cheryl Saferstein

Lee Shore

Tami Wolf

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Tracey Jacobowitz

MOSCOW HILLEL

Anna Baram

Sophia Gershteyn

Ilya Ginzburg

Anna Khakhamovich

Svetlana Lerman

Natalya Myasnikova

Galina Petrenko

Mikhail Pinkhasov

Ilya Tsarfin

Anastasia Zhukovskaya

PROGRAM COORDINATORS

Lesley Weiss, Director of Community Services and Cultural Affairs, NCSJ

Anna Ermanok, Director of Public Relations, Moscow Hillel

Mindy Hirsch, Associate Director, American University Hillel



Participants on a tour of the U.S. Capitol.

INTRODUCTION

From October 12-19, 2009 NCSJ hosted 16 Russian and American Jewish students for an eight-day advocacy training program in Washington, D.C.

Jewish students from Moscow, American University and The George Washington University participated in an exclusive leadership program focusing on advocacy and cross-cultural dialogue in Washington, D.C. The program, coordinated by NCSJ in collaboration with Moscow and American University Hillels was funded by the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington (JFGW) as part of its Washington-Moscow Connection.

Students from Moscow Hillel who participated in NCSJ's Student Leadership Program in Moscow in 2008 and 2009 joined their American counterparts to continue their educational and leadership development, addressing issues of Jewish identity, advocacy, combating anti-Semitism, and building civil society.

The eight-day seminar was part of NCSJ's ongoing and vibrant Student Leadership Program, which develops the next generation of international Jewish leadership and build bonds between Jewish leaders in the United States and the former Soviet Union.

The program is part of the JFGW Washington-Moscow Connection, which empowers Jews to help shape their communities and works to engage unaffiliated Jews in both cities.

The major themes addressed during the week included Jewish religious and organizational life, anti-Semitism, and democracy-building. The program included an intensive schedule of meetings and experiences. Venues included the Russian and Israeli Embassies, Office of Russian Affairs at the U.S. Department of State, and the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe. The participants also met with Washington, D.C. area Jewish community representatives including JFGW Executive Director and CEO Misha Galperin and Wayne Firestone, President of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life.



Participants at the National Museum of Natural History.



Participants outside the U.S. Capitol.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- Meetings with representatives from the American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League and B'nai B'rith International
- Lunch with Oren Anolik, Embassy of Israel
- Meeting with Dr. Pamela Nadell, Director, American University Jewish Studies Program
- Tour of American University Campus with Rabbi Kenneth Cohen, Hillel Executive Director, Mindy Hirsch, Hillel Associate Director, and student leaders
- Shabbat services at Sixth & I Historic Synagogue with MesorahDC
- Meeting with Grigory Borisenko, Senior Counselor, Embassy of the Russian Federation
- Discussions on anti-Semitism in Russia and in the United States
- Discussions on democracy and freedom
- Home hospitality and touring
- Hiddur Mitzvah project at Gary Rosenthal Studio
- Visit to the Jewish Community Center of Greater Washington
- Shabbat services and dinner at University of Maryland College Park Hillel
- Russian language tour of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum



FULL REPORT

JEWISH LEADERSHIP MEETINGS

Misha Galperin, Executive Director and CEO of the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington spoke about his family’s emigration from Russia, the Washington, D.C. Jewish community, and the JFGW Washington-Moscow Connection programs. He explained the Jewish Federation system and network of agencies that are beneficiaries of the Federation. He noted the similarities between Washington, D.C. and Moscow – cities with high levels of educated citizens, a somewhat transient community, and similarly-sized Jewish populations. After his presentation, the students divided into groups and practiced serving as an allocations committee, deciding how to award limited resources to a number of Jewish organizations and needy causes. Moscow participant **Sophia Gershteyn** said, “It was a pleasure to listen to Misha Galperin, learn about his vision of how the community should work, how it should involve people, how to distribute its budget.”



Misha Galperin discusses the Federation.



Moscow students participate in an allocation activity.

Dr. Pamela S. Nadell, Professor of History and Director of the American University Jewish Studies Program, discussed Jewish life at American University and provided an overview of the Jewish Studies program. The participants were particularly interested in learning about what graduates do with a degree in Jewish Studies, and had many questions about tuition costs, Jewish activity, and how the role of the professor and teaching styles differed between the United States and Russia.



Moscow participant **Natalya Myasnikova** said, “Student life in the U.S. is similar to student life in Moscow, but there is more freedom for the student in the U.S. That students in the U.S. choose for themselves subjects for training and make their own schedule already speaks about the huge difference.”

Pamela Nadell addresses participants at American University.

The students met with **Ella Kagan**, Principal of Shalom Education Center, a supplementary school offering courses in Russian and Jewish education for children of Russian Jewish immigrants. She spoke about her personal story of persecution in the Soviet Union and her struggle to leave and immigrate to the United States, and about the Russian academic and cultural subjects offered at Shalom Education Center.

Wayne L. Firestone, President of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life spoke to the students at the International Hillel Center. They discussed Jewish student activism and leadership on university campuses. Afterwards, the group held a discussion on outreach and building relationships.



Students at a lunchtime meeting with Wayne Firestone.

Guy Billauer, American Jewish Committee Associate Director of National and Legislative Affairs, **Eric Fusfield**, B'nai B'rith International Deputy Director of Legislative Affairs, and **Michael Lieberman**, Director of the Anti-Defamation League's Civil Rights Policy Planning Center discussed a wide range of domestic and international issues including intergroup relations, hate crimes legislation, the Iran nuclear threat, U.S.-Israel relations, and other national agency priorities.



Meeting with ADL, AJC and BBI.



Students express their feelings about the trip.

EMBASSY BRIEFINGS

Grigory Borisenko, Senior Consul at the Embassy of the Russian Federation briefed the group about U.S.-Russian relations. He would like to see visa-free travel between the U.S. and Russia as exists between Israel and Russia. He talked about U.S.-Russia educational exchanges and his outreach in Washington to think tanks and other organizations. He also answered questions about living in the United States as a Russian diplomat.



Above: Russian Embassy.
Right: Group at the Embassy.



Regarding Iran, he said that Russia condemns President Ahmadinejad's statements denying the Holocaust, but did not condemn Iran regarding its nuclear program, noting that Russia does not prohibit a country's development of nuclear energy.



Oren Anolik, Counselor for Political Affairs at the Embassy of Israel, discussed the trilateral relations between the United States, Russia and Israel. He spoke about Russia's relationship with Iran and what the U.S. policy of "resetting" relations with Russia will mean for Israel. He said that Israel maintains a good and ongoing dialogue with both President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin.

Oren Anolik, right, meets with the participants.

U.S. GOVERNMENT MEETINGS

Michael K. Fogo, Political Officer at the U.S. Department of State, described the work of the Russia Desk, which is one of the agency's largest foreign departments. His department coordinates diplomatic visits to Russia and the United States and collaborates on producing the Russia sections of the U.S. religious freedom and human rights reports. They also participate in the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission, a working group for U.S. and Russian officials to jointly address issues of concern to both countries, including nuclear energy, nuclear security, arms control, fighting terrorism, drug trafficking, business development, agriculture, science and technology, space cooperation, health, civil society, and educational and cultural exchanges.



Moscow participant Galina Petrenko and Michael K. Fogo.



Students discuss the CSCE with (l.-r.) Kyle Parker and Ron McNamara.

Kyle Parker, Policy Advisor for Eurasia at the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Commission) and his colleagues, **Ron McNamara**, Policy Advisor and **Neil Simon**, Communications Director, described the Commission's work as an independent U. S. Government agency that monitors and encourages compliance with the Helsinki Final Act and other commitments made by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. The group discussed religious freedom and anti-Semitism in Russia and the Russia-Georgia conflict. American participant **Lee Shore** said, "I had never heard of the Helsinki Commission, even though I know about the OSCE, and I found the meeting with them to be fascinating. I was intrigued that such a unique part of the government existed, especially under Congress as opposed to under the Executive Branch."

VISITS TO JEWISH INSTITUTIONS

Jewish Community Center of Greater Washington

The group toured the Center and learned about its many programs and services. **Natalya Myasnikova** said, "One place which made upon me the greatest impression was our visit to the JCC which is such a huge center, with a developed infrastructure I have not ever seen before, as well as a large number of programs and a large number of visitors."

American University Hillel

Rabbi Kenneth Cohen, Executive Director of American University Hillel, led a tour of the Hillel offices, located in the AU Kay Spiritual Life Center, and talked about the university's vibrant Jewish life, touching on student participation, freedom of religion, and freedom of speech on campus.

Students also toured the American University campus and dorms. Moscow participant **Natalya Myasnikova** observed, "American society is very tolerant; different faiths are allowed to co-exist under one roof and be united in centers such as the Kay Spiritual Life Center."

Students in the AU Kay Spiritual Life Center with Rabbi Kenneth Cohen.



University of Maryland Hillel

The group was invited to join hundreds of students for Friday night Shabbat services and dinner. Moscow participant **Svetlana Lerman** said, "I was surprised to see so many people on Shabbat in Maryland! And it was a weekly holiday. I even can't imagine how many people are there on Purim, Rosh-Ha-Shana, etc! I liked the Hillel office! It provides excellent recreational and educational facilities to have a good time there!" Moscow participant **Sophia Gershteyn** said, "The strongest community spirit I felt was at the Shabbat services at University of Maryland Hillel. That was so strange and astonishing at the same time to see so many young people who come not only to observe traditions but also to meet old friends and find new ones."

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

Hiddur Mitzvah Project



Hiddur Mitzvah means "enhancement of" or "beautification of" the mitzvah. Hosted by artist Gary Rosenthal at his Kensington studio, the group created their own Judaica using mixed metal and brilliant fused glass to design mezuzot. In addition to the mezuzot, Mr Rosenthal gave the Moscow group a set of candlesticks to be used at Moscow Hillel.

Left: The students creating mezuzot as part of the Hiddur Mitzvah Project.

Washington participant **Nira Lee** described the experience:

“So many of our programs talk about Judaism – we talk about customs. We talk about interpretations. We talk about differences. This can be difficult at times when there is such a large language and cultural barrier between us. But at Gary’s we created. Gary showed us how we can learn about, and make Judaism beautiful and pleasurable through art. Through touring his studio, to the mezuzahs he helped us make, to the beautiful gift he gave the Moscow students, this experience helped us come together through art and beauty.”

In addition to their formal meetings, the students also toured the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Newseum, monuments, the White House and the U.S. Capitol. At the Capitol, the group witnessed Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi presiding over the opening ceremony of a session of the House of Representatives. Moscow participant **Ilya Ginsburg** observed, “I was pleasantly surprised that we were lucky to get to a meeting of the government. I liked the ceremony; I think it was not an imaginary commitment to democracy. “



Students lighting candles in memorial hall at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.



Activities at the Newseum

The students spent Shabbat morning with MesorahDC at Sixth & I Historic Synagogue, and were welcomed into the homes of several American University students for home hospitality.



Havdalah at the home of an American University participant.

SUMMARY

An eight-day trip to Washington is an exciting prospect for any Moscow student. What set this program apart was NCSJ's access to American, Russian and Israeli government officials and Jewish community leaders, and the joint participation in these meetings of the U.S. and Russian students. Equally important as the speakers were the students' shared experiences in meetings, their tours of Washington, and their discussions about anti-Semitism, Jewish identity, issues of democracy, and American and Russian Jewish life.

As the following excerpts from the students' impressions show, this program informed and inspired excitement in this group of young adults about Jewish life, Jewish identity, and international leadership development.

Student Impressions (excerpts)



Nira Lee
Washington, D.C.

After we returned from Moscow in March, 2008, I was completely energized. I couldn't wait for our new Russian friends to get to America, so that we could show them what life is like here. I had learned so much not only about the history of Russian/FSU Jewry, but I had seen with my own eyes how rich a community exists there today. We all kept in touch at the beginning--sharing photos and making plans for our next meeting. But as the time went on and nearly two years past, a lot of what I had learned and experienced in Russia seemed to get stored with my photos on a memory chip. When Lesley told us they were coming, I went back to my photos on my computer and I found not only the pictures, but the lessons and the memories.

After being apart for so long--and having a differently structured program, it was hard at first to pick up where we left off--to earn each other's trust again to talk about the personal, sometimes difficult things. One of the activities that really, in my mind, helped us do that was our visit to Gary Rosenthal's studio. The greatest lesson that I learned while in Russia was that we need to support Russian Jews as just that, Russian Jews.

After the waves of Russians to Israel, the general mindset seems to assume that all Russian Jews want to, or should want to live in Israel or come to America. This attitude has caused those Jews that are still in Russia, trying to enjoy life in their country, to be overlooked. I was ignorant. I wondered why they were not all rushing to make aliyah or come here. But when I began to interact with them, learn about their culture, and think about how nobody has the right to tell me I should give up my home, I realized how important it is to provide support to this community. I believe that this trip embodies that sentiment. This trip shows that we not only support them as Jews, but most importantly, that we support them as Russian Jews. The Jews of Russia epitomize Jewish perseverance, and they have a strong culture.

This lesson further resonated with me when they came over here. During our time there, there was a lot of discussion about many of them making aliyah. Many of them hinted to that possibility, which grew as they became even more disenchanted with their government. So I was surprised when that idea was off the radar for most of them. I didn't understand why. My roommate, Anna Khakhamovich, with whom I had remained close with since our trip to Moscow showed me why when she stood up and said, "If we all leave, who is left to fix this mess--who is there to stand up for us". This is a spirit that should be commended, and these are leaders that should be supported.

It would be cliché--and perhaps a bit juvenile to say that once again, the most rewarding parts of the program were nights singing, playing card games in the hotel, and eating pizza together. But in my mind, that is what it comes down to--the fact that we come together from radically different worlds, backgrounds, customs, and languages, but we somehow find the our sameness as young Jews who want to make a difference in the world.

It was great to see my Russian friends again! It was very meaningful for me to visit the Newseum with them and view the display of murdered journalists. Misha and I each pointed out the journalists from our countries who had died and we had a moment of reflection.

The Washington, D.C. Jewish community showed how large and important they are to Jews all over the world and how our hearts connect regardless of where we are from.



Josh Cook
Washington, D.C.



Misha Pinkhasov
Moscow

I have many impressions about Washington. The overall comfortable and quiet atmosphere, numerous parks, museums, the 170-meter marble steel, the Lincoln Memorial. The fact that we could enter the White House and see the priceless paintings and exhibition of historical documents. This is precisely the interpretation of democracy and freedom!

Thank you very much for the warm reception at the homes where we were! I liked it very much and was pleased to see so many Jews at the Maryland Hillel. It was an unusual meeting of the Shabbat! Lunch with Misha Galperin was very informative. I learned many new things. I also enjoyed breakfast with Dr. Pamela Nadell.

While I was in Moscow, one of the more meaningful things was dispelling the stereotypes that the Russians held concerning Americans. While I can't say that any particular meeting or event did this, I believe the entire trip further dispelled any remaining stereotypes of Americans which the Russians held. I believe this was one of the most meaningful aspects of the trip.

The program has reinforced my belief that "Wherever you go, there's always someone Jewish."



Lee Shore
Washington, D.C.

The Russians shared their city with us last year, and now we finally had the chance to share ours with them. To see them again was amazing.

The times we were able to bond with one another and strengthen the relationships we started last year were the most special to me.



Tami Wolf
Washington, D.C.



Anna Ermanok
Hillel Director of
Public Relations
Moscow

The really meaningful meetings were those that showed all the contradictions we had in our heads such as the meeting with Ella Kagan and with Kyle Parker.

Although I have been to the U.S. several times before, I've never celebrated Shabbat on a university campus. It was so great and I am still impressed, by the atmosphere and initiative of the students.

I learned more about the community rules during Shabbat. It was interesting to meet with people belonging to different streams of Judaism in America. In Russia there is a different understanding of Conservative Judaism.

The visit to the U.S Capitol impressed me a lot. Collective prayer and the structure of the proceedings were a good illustration of American style of democracy.

I really liked the program. It was full of different meetings, but at the same time the students had enough free time and had a possibility not only to learn about official part of American life, but at the same time to learn more about how real people live in the U.S.

Hillel in Russia is under reform process at the moment. I spent really interesting time learning more about Hillel in the U.S. and wondering about how our organization would work in the future.

I think that two meetings were particularly important and memorable: the visit to the Helsinki Commission and to the Israeli Embassy. Both of them proved that America and Israel too are concerned with the issues that are important to us – but they sometimes have even more knowledge and expertise in the fields where we, to our embarrassment, have none (but should).

Within the Jewish part of program – I'd say that I enjoyed the tour of JCC of Greater Washington and Shabbat service at Maryland University. JCC's great: it's unimaginably big for us and offers a startling range of activities. University of Maryland

Hillel was wonderful because of the number of people: in Moscow we are happy when 8-10 people turn up for Shabbat instead of the usual 4-5... (I knew that there are many Jews in America – but it was surprising to learn that there are so many of them, especially at universities.) These two visits just confirmed my previous impression that it's substantially



Galina Petrenko
Moscow

simpler to be a Jew and to live a Jewish life in America in any possible way – whatever it means to a person. Basically, neither the state nor society interferes or tries to suppress your identity in any way – they rather help to discover it.

This is, of course, one of the signs of a democratic country. In Russia we often argue whether US society is in reality a “concealed totalitarianism”. Of course, things aren’t perfect in the U.S. too – but after seeing the Capitol, which is beautiful on its own, and how the Congress really works – after seeing it live I would say that America is as close to democracy and civil society as a country can be nowadays. It is very impressive to see how democratic institutions and instruments indeed work.

I was also impressed to see how ordinary Americans – our fellow students, or taxi-drivers, or people in the streets – are proud to be American and to live in this country, even if they criticize it a lot, just because they feel freedom and can use their freedoms (i.e., freedom of expression, of assembly, of conscience, etc).

Of course, I enjoyed the excursions we had – to the White House, because under no other circumstances would be have a chance to go there, to the Newseum and to the Holocaust Museum. I only wish we had more time to spend there...

In some ways, I envy Jewish community and Jewish organizations in America because they have really powerful instruments of influence and a stronger and clearer concept of what a Jewish community is. I believe that even though I knew about America and Jewish life in America before the trip, it helped me to better understand what we should aspire to in Russia.

I got significantly more involved into Jewish life here in Moscow after the program in Moscow. I hope I’ll continue to be more involved from now on. Thanks again for that amazing week!!



Ilya Ginsburg
Moscow

I think the most meaningful events were the meeting with Misha Galperin, Lesley Israel and allocations exercise; tour of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum; Shabbat at University of Maryland Hillel; tour of American University (multiconfessional center!), and visiting Helsinki committee. I also liked the soulful, warm meeting with Rita Simon.

I had a prejudice that America is a country of consumption, something like, information, material wealth. Now I think America is, above all, freedom, religious freedom, and civil freedom.

I knew that in America there are Jews, many Jews. But it was shocking and pleasant to see it. In America, Jews seem to be able realize their potential, which is somewhat difficult in the CIS. Shabbat at Hillel Maryland was fantastic, thank you! So many Jews, whose roots are from completely different places, but they were together in Maryland.

It was informative to see America and Jewish life in America, it was a good experience. I Hope this will improve my self-identification with the Jewish world.

The most interesting meetings, from my point of view, were with Michael K. Fogo from the State Department and Kyle Parker from the Helsinki Commission, to understand their purposes and actions in their work. It was also exciting to listen to Ella Kagan and Dr. Pamela S. Nadell, to learn about the education system and Jewish life in educational centers.



Svetlana Lerman
Moscow

What about America in common, I can say that I liked it a lot! The law is everything in this country and I was ensured of it when walking in the streets, you don't worry about your life. To sum up, you feel comfortable. People are friendly and ready to help you. I was surprised to find out that Washington is such a quiet city (compared with Moscow, New York). And many squirrels - good environmental conditions!

I met some interesting people in the American Jewish community and I'm going to be in touch with them. I think it's a great experience to participate in such kind of program. The American Jewish community is one of the biggest in the world. And it was really interesting to see Jewish life on the other side of the world, to know their points of view on this or that problem in our days, to understand mentality.



Natalya Myasnikova
Moscow

Throughout our visit in Washington, we visited a set of places interesting to me, beginning from the U.S. Capitol to the Hillel at American University. Our visit to the Holocaust museum made a great impression on me with every detail interesting and informative. Meetings in Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, and also with heads of NCSJ were informative, interesting and meaningful. Our visit to Hillel in Maryland impressed me – simply huge Hillel. Dream of Hillel Moscow.

Also I was impressed with the openness of the policy of the US, during our visit to the Capitol where we became spectators of a TV-debate.

The picture of American life very strongly differs from we have are used to in Russia. To understand more it would be necessary to spend much more time, but for that time interval which we were in Washington we have learned, thanks to our organizers, as much as possible. We have visited a set of places - where the public and political life is formed, where modern realities of a society are in the best way reflected.

I knew about the Jewish life in America a little from a course of lectures given by Dr. Michael Chlenov at my University, and when I saw it myself, I am convinced that it strongly differs from an image familiar to me. The Jewish life is much more varied in the US than in Moscow, and for each Jew the choice is much wider. A Jew can be a Jew in the states already from childhood.

The American government is very open and accessible. The greatest impression made on many of us was by Kyle Parker, Policy Advisor for Eurasia, because of his openness and professionalism.

I have learned a lot of new things and have visited official places. The program itself was very meaningful and has left a set of bright impressions, for which I wish to express the hugest

thanks to organizers and Lesley Weiss directly who realized all of this to become true. And also I'd like to thank our master-guide Allochka, (Alla Lipsky) who spent lots of time with us, and Anna Ermanok who organized the process in Moscow.

Everything was really perfect! The logistics were organized perfectly. And one more time I'd like to thank all of organizers who made this journey happen.



Sophia Gershteyn
Moscow

For me it was very important to have the opportunity not just to observe Jewish life from outside but to participate in events and talk to people who have influence on Jewish life.

I was pretty surprised that the stereotype about Americans that they care so much about freedom and tolerance is so true! Everywhere – in the museums, in the streets, on commercials, talking to people - I saw different manifestations of the fact that Americans appreciate equal rights for everybody.

One of the most amazing things was to see so strong religious sector in students' life at American University because in comparison with what is usual for us-total separation of education and religion. That was something really new. I could never imagine a hall for praying at university!

As I see it the structure of the program was just perfect because we had all types of activities in the trip: meetings, sightseeing, museums, Jewish services, hospitality dinners, shopping. So we were not too tired in the end of the day.

I believe the most important reason to stay in the Jewish community is to have real relationships with people from this community. For sure after the program my connections with the community became much stronger and I have a great feeling of belonging not just to the local community but to the international Jewish community.

I really enjoyed the visit to the Holocaust Museum and to the Newseum. I also liked the Israeli Embassy.

As a rule, we have some drastic prejudices as far as any foreign country is concerned. I had many of them before I went to the US. People find that Americans in general are rather narrow-minded and not really educated or curious but they are much more eager and able to learn and to think than the snobby Europeans are. You, guys, are in fact extremely devoted to the history of your own country, you do care about the way your culture is preserved and developed.



Anna Khakhamovich
Moscow

American Jewish life is much brighter and more various than in any country I have ever been to. It is open, accessible and seems not to have any restrictions or limits. It contains both: education and entertainment and provides proper facilities for several age groups covering their needs and requirements.

I fancied the University we have seen: it is huge and seems to have every thinkable department headed by professionals.

Since I'm not engaged in politics, I didn't pay much attention to this particular issue, being distracted from the content by either the building interior or the appearance of officials we were constantly running into.

In fact the program was fantastic: you managed to cover many aspects which gave us kind of a big picture. However, sometimes we were just overwhelmed - and not by the fact but by the amount of facts we had to think over, in other words at some points we had just too much.

I would love to do more for the Jewish community if it were a bit more similar to the yours – big and crowded.

The most interesting for me was the meeting with representatives of human rights association. This was a really interesting meeting, with a great amount of new interesting information for me. I don't know a lot about a similar Russian association but I'm sure, it is impossible to make such kind of a rather powerful organization in Russia, which can be so free and active in this area.



Ilya Tsarfin
Moscow

Most amazing for me was not America, but Americans! When I see the famous American smile, before this visit, I think this is not real, this is only a mask. But now I'm sure, Americans are really friendly and this is a real spirit of the nation! It is really amazing for me, and I hope some day Russian people also have this same character.

When we were in the university, the same prayer hall for all the religions - was what I never can imagine before. This is perfect! This is what is really important, the main aim to achieve friendship among all the religions, all the people from all the nationalities.

In the United States you can see the actions that result from your congressman's vote. You can see his actions. You can see if his point of view is the same as yours. If we elect somebody, vote for him, he is our voice in the congress and we should have the opportunity to see what he does!

Thanks a lot, for this amazing trip, Lesley! This was the most interesting foreign adventure I have had!