

Nyche Andrew, AK - 2021

“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.”

Quoted Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas of the famous poem *The Road Not Taken* by Robert Frost. In 8th grade, I vividly remember analyzing this very poem and thinking to myself how inapplicable it is to me. It was not until Justice Thomas recited it and I realized the meaning of the poem: that life is what you make of it. Throughout all of high school, I've kept my head down, my heart open, and followed my opportunities with excitement and passion. Because of this, I had the honor to be an Alaska delegate for the United States Senate Youth Program.

With Washington Week ONLINE, the focus was not centered around the marble beauty of D. C. architecture; the focus was, instead, taking what the speakers said and building something of it with that alone. In many ways, I am grateful for that. Throughout Washington Week I got to hear from remarkable speakers and though I may not remember exact quotes of what everyone said, I do remember the impression and life perspective they imparted.

Through Justice Thomas's time with us, I took away with me a new life perspective rather than interpretations and stances on past Supreme Court cases. He shared with us how unexpected his life turned out to be, how sometimes the most unimaginable journey is filled with the greatest reward. Justice Thomas showed a perfect emulation of the Robert Frost poem and helped me accept that so long as I am honest to myself, I will move through life and embrace the unexpected.

Another speaker I thoroughly enjoyed was Ms. Norah O'Donnell of CBS News. From her introduction, question response, and outro, she had me hooked at every single word she spoke. Ms. O'Donnell emulated thoughtfulness and power that commanded my attention. She inspired me to challenge how I present myself to groups of people; to challenge myself to be thoughtful and powerful. Hearing from a strong female was especially empowering, showing me that institutions headed by women can be and are revolutionary.

Lastly, I enjoyed hearing from was Senate Historian Dr. Betty Koed. Upon answering my question, she explained that every examination of history is a revision: we look with eyes wiser than before as we attempt to understand the action of our ancestors. Dr. Koed's time was especially interesting to me as one of my favorite subjects is history. I love history because we don't know the impact of current major events, how it will affect future worldly decisions, or even our own lives. We just hope that we move through it with resilience and grace.

The greatest legacy I will carry from this program are the fellow peers I met in persistence of time zones and location. From meeting on the late-night Zooms, Discord group chats, and Instagram— it feels as though I met these amazing minds in person without barriers, and for a moment, forgetting about the pandemic. The greatest gift my fellow delegates gave me was acceptance. Through land acknowledgments delegates gave in their roll call video and encouragement to share my perspective, I truly felt welcomed among a group who share this world and future with me.

Serving as an Alaska delegate for the United States Senate Youth Program 2021 has been one of my greatest honors as a high school student. I am extremely grateful for the generosity of the scholarship and accommodation to an online event. I may not know what roads and paths I'm yet to take, but I do know that being in this program will reveal less traveled by paths that are sure to spark adventure and blessing.