

## **Marissa Meador, IN - 2021**

My first moment of awe during Washington Week came when I was watching the Roll Call of the States. As beautiful landscapes and snow-laden structures flashed across my eyes—the lush, green tranquility of Hawaii, the flowering cacti of Arizona, and the chiseled buildings of Connecticut—I finally understood the incredible feat of the United States, encompassing such a broad and diverse land while holding true to the promise of benign governance and individual liberty. Ultimately, it was the people that hailed from these states that inspired me most, each representing their areas with thoughtful questions and an immense respect for public service. These individuals pushed me to consider other facets of issues, perfect my questions for speakers, and generally motivated me to be better.

The speakers themselves come from diverse backgrounds as well, and through their discussions I was able to view public service through the lens of health, science, law, history, military service, media, and diplomacy. I marveled at Judge Henry's explanation of judicial precedent through a symphony metaphor, imagined the political perspective from space, and furiously scribbled down Ms. Norah O'Donnell's soundbites of wisdom, especially the importance of distinction between affirmation and information in the rapidly evolving digital world. I compared the state of the Senate in the midst of division through the perspectives of Senator Lankford and Senator Baldwin, who emphasized the importance of serving over fighting.

One of my favorite speakers was Ms. Gina McCarthy, the national climate advisor and former administrator of the EPA. I loved her perspective on emphasizing the pressing human effects of environmental issues; as a huge advocate for protecting our climate, I saw her beliefs confirmed in the passionate gatherings of people in my rural community when it came to cleaning up trash by the river or studying the groundwater pollution that has led to significant health effects. I believe that Ms. McCarthy has a nuanced and expert grasp on the issue, and listening to her speak gave me an immense amount of hope for the future.

As the program came to a close, Mr. Noah Harris's speech blew me away with its candor, detailing the difficulties of public service and adjusting to life at Harvard. I was inspired by his story of injustice he experienced in Mississippi, which was the motivating factor for his decision to pursue law. He perfectly summed up the importance of the United States Senate Youth program as a steppingstone for dedicated student leaders to become the public servants our country needs most. The program encourages us to deliberate on our past, discuss our present, and envision the future with the wild imagination of the Founders when they dared to press pen to paper. As I reflect on this past week, I am humbled by the opportunity the program provided me and have never been more inspired to pursue a lifetime of service.