

## Arnav Dharmagadda, KY – 2022

On Thursday, February 24th, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, thereby, in the words of General Mark Milley, violating the international order. A tense atmosphere of polarization in Congress, the continued threat of climate change, and more apparent systemic injustices only complicated this situation. Starting a mere ten days later, Washington Week Online could not be more timely. Over those four days of scrupulously recording happenings in my notebook, I would come to understand the influences of the past, the nuances of the present, and the potential I hold to shape the future.

The guiding role that the past, the foundations of America, would play in Washington Week became clear from the moment I opened my gift box. Among the numerous treasured keepsakes, the package enclosed a rectangular pocket Constitution and Declaration of Independence, the sight of which immediately reminded me of Khizr Khan's speech at the 2016 DNC calling for a return to fundamental principles of our country. Like Mr. Khan, Washington Week's keynote speakers also called for the same return to the Constitution in such trying times. Justice Kennedy would discuss the principle of the separation of powers, indicating how the carefully crafted institutions protect democratic values. Senate Historian Dr. Koed reminded us of our government's mistakes, including failing to pass anti-lynching legislation. She discussed persistence, and on the following day, the United States Senate passed legislation to make lynching a federal hate crime. Dr. Koed's story embodies the concept of forming a *more perfect union*, enshrined in the Preamble, and my role in carrying out this mandate. These speakers underscored the importance that the Constitution, our historic founding charter, serves as I seek the ever-important goal of progress.

The keynote speakers addressed contemporary issues, which gave me insight into the inner workings of our government in addressing global concerns. Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield provided an intriguing argument about the role diplomacy plays in addressing the Ukraine-Russia conflict. Her perspective paired well with General Milley's words, in which he highlighted the egregious nature of Russia's actions and discussed the extent of American involvement. Senators Collins, Coons, and Gardner addressed the importance of bipartisanship, regaling tales of cooperation often excluded from media coverage. The speeches of Mr. Zaidi and Secretary Buttigieg discussed the threat of climate change and the response both international and domestic. The words of Ms. Vanita Gupta about ongoing efforts to tackle systemic racism and right wrongs, like her work in Tulia, were truly inspirational. The advice of these distinguished leaders revealed another side of Washington DC, one of cooperation and problem-solving, which compels me to pursue a career in this environment of change-making without the fear of a standstill in innovation.

The entirety of Washington Week was inspirational to me and my prospects in forming the much-discussed *more perfect union*. My military mentor, Major Matthew Pellegrine, instilled a determination to seek opportunities for development and the potential my fellow delegates and I have for success. Major General David Isaacson emphasized a similar sentiment, issuing a call to service and leadership. He stressed his belief in the extraordinary future we hold as we should pursue the opportunities provided to us. I left Washington Week with a fuller understanding of government, a greater desire to serve, and an incredible network of delegates, leaders. Departing Washington Week, I know that, as I am grounded in the principles enshrined in the Constitution, building off the momentum of current progress, I, motivated, will continue on a path of problem-solving in the constant pursuit of a *more perfect union*.