

Anika Dugal, NJ – 2024

As I reflect on the U.S. Senate Youth Program, a phrase springs to mind in one of my family's native tongues: 一心一意 (*yī xīn yī yì*). This Mandarin saying translates literally to mean “of one heart, of one purpose.” It refers to a sense of unified ambition, passion, and determination. I can't think of a better way to sum up the community I found at Washington Week—while every person I met had a unique story to tell and a specialized area of impact, we all shared a common compassion and desire to change the world.

Before reaching Washington Week, each student delegate had already tangibly touched their community for the better. But the lessons imparted during this incredible program have undoubtedly made us into better humans and changemakers. The iconic government buildings we visited, from the White House to the Pentagon, gave us a taste of leadership at the pinnacles of our federal government. The Better Angels workshop and the Department of State diplomacy simulation showed us what equitable and thoughtful leadership looked like. And the captivating speakers we met taught us the true meaning of leadership: putting the needs of our communities before our own.

In particular, two speakers stood out to me: Mr. Brian Kamoie and Senator Catherine Cortez Masto. First, Mr. Kamoie's career of blending private sector technology and government legislation strongly mirrors the path I aim to pursue. As the director of Cyber & Strategic Risk at Deloitte, as well as a former member of the White House National Security Council, Mr. Kamoie provided the perfect role model for my aspirations in the intersection of technology, cybersecurity, and public policy. He also was a wonderful example of balancing humor and ambition, sharing lighthearted stories of his time on the White House National Security Council and urging us to make the most of our “one wild and precious life.”

Secondly, Senator Catherine Cortez Masto awed me with the transformative gun violence prevention legislation she has enacted, as well as her ability to effortlessly balance the diverse needs of her constituents. During her presentation at the Mayflower, she described the gun violence prevention measures she spearheaded following the tragic 2017 Las Vegas shooting. As the representative of a highly diverse state, Senator Cortez Masto described her approach towards ensuring that the voices of all Nevadans are heard in her decision making. Senator Cortez Masto was an inspiration to listen to, and truly a model of effective political leadership.

I feel immensely grateful to have had the opportunity to participate in Washington Week. Serving as a U.S. Senate Youth delegate is without a doubt one of my proudest achievements. I also know that I could not have reached this honor without the unwavering support of my community, including the educators who sparked my interest in my government and my parents who have always encouraged my ambitions. I leave Washington Week with a full heart and a feeling that can be hard to come by in today's ever-changing world—certainty. I feel utterly confident that our collective future is in good hands. Each delegate will change the world for the better in their own way. Together, we are *yī xīn yī yì*.