

Pranika Kumar, MN – 2025

What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life? The best way I could describe why Washington Week was so life-changing was because of the way it altered how I think. As a junior in high school, I'm often asked the big questions: what do you want to do, where do you want to go, what's next? And truthfully, I don't have a perfect answer. I'm still figuring it out.

But this week taught me something: I don't need to have all the answers, I just need to be willing to learn and lead with curiosity. If one quote stuck out to me this week it would be the words of Bryan Kamoie —*"What is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"* This week didn't just inspire me to ask that question, it helped me begin answering it.

Over the week, I met individuals who both challenged and strengthened me. First, my fellow 103 delegates from across the country and DoDEA, each one passionate, accomplished, and incredibly humble, inspired me beyond words. I also had the chance to speak with, engage, and question leaders, scientists, and public servants: NASA astronauts from Crew 71, Justice Brett Kavanaugh, Deputy Chief Ana Luisa Fajer, both of my Minnesota senators, and so many more. Hearing each of them describe their roles with such purpose and joy reminded me that passion isn't just part of the job, it's what makes the work meaningful.

Among the countless stories and invaluable pieces of wisdom these speakers shared, three quotes stood out and reshaped the way I think about purpose, identity, and leadership.

1. Secretary of State Marco Rubio told us: *"When you're old and passing away, no one ever says, 'I wish I made more money.' They say, 'I wish I spent more time with family and friends. I wish I was more involved.'"* Life is short, too short to focus on the things that don't matter. We should prioritize our relationships and the things that truly bring us joy.
2. At NASA headquarters when asked how she navigates being a woman and a woman of color in such a field, Astronaut Dr. Jeanette Epps said something that truly stuck with me. She answered the question simply by saying *"I'm not a Black astronaut. I'm not a female astronaut. I'm just an astronaut."* In my journey, I don't need to fit a label to belong. Being a woman of color is part of who I am, but it will never be the ceiling of what I become.
3. Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Troy E Black said, *"If not you, then who?"* That quote echoed in my mind. It was a call to action, one that reminded me that leadership is about rising to the moment, even when it's uncomfortable, even when it's hard.

So while I don't know exactly what I'll do with my one wild and precious life, I do know exactly how I want to live it: boldly, with purpose, and making every moment count.