

## **Anna Dean, AR - 2021**

As I was preparing for the 2021 Washington Week ONLINE experience, I received a box with a blue leather journal and pen to capture the memories I would collect through this transformative experience. I then made it my goal to keep a beautiful journal documenting organized notes from speakers, tours, and the words of my fellow delegates. Unfortunately, things did not go as according to plan. As I flip through my journal, my handwriting gets consistently worse. Although my note-taking hopes were not met, my experience at the 2021 United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) far surpassed any expectations I could have ever had.

To start, Circuit Judge Robert Henry stated, “the judiciary should look like the society it is adjudicating.” I think in this sentiment is imperative to rethink and reconceptualize our ideals about the judicial system in the United States. Additionally, I found his view on bipartisan cooperation inspiring and energizing. Judge Henry's passion for change in a historically unequal state, resonates with my future aspirations to reform institutions in the South. His words made me excited and hopeful for the future of equity in various governmental organizations!

Additionally, Norah O'Donnell's words about journalism being the very foundation that makes democracy work made me appreciate the media in a time when it seems all we do is criticize it. Cycles of abuse fester in silence and the press bring issues to light!

The highlight of my week was paradoxically the end of it. In the last moments of the program, Noah Harris made me realize the extent to which my life had changed. The Senate Youth Program gave me 103 best friends, along with a network of hundreds of alumni. From conversations with my Military Mentor group about U.S. imperialism to the separation of church and state, the dialogue and clash of ideas conveyed the beauty of bipartisanship and U.S. democracy.

Never before in my life had I been exposed to so many diverse people with very different distinct lived experiences to share. I learned about the issues facing native Hawaiians during COVID-19 and issues of labor unions in the Midwest. At the end of the day, life is all about the people. Without a doubt, my astonishing fellow delegates, are the part of the U.S. Senate Youth Program that will have positive impacts on me for the rest of my life. I know that the USSYP class of 2021 is going to change the world.

Even though my chicken scratch handwriting wasn't my original plan, I will cherish every use of ink for the rest of my life. Ultimately, my virtual Washington Week was full of transformational conversations, speeches, and dialogue that has altered my world perspective and even values. The U.S. Senate Youth Program instilled and confirmed my sincere passion for service. I cannot wait to bring my blue U.S. Senate Youth Program notebook to my office on Capitol Hill one day!