

Nathaniel Cross, AZ – 2021

Dear fellow delegates, distinguished guests, and hosts of the 59th annual Washington Week,

In the weeks after receiving my official program Welcome Box, but before the very first United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) Tech Orientation Meeting, I thought that by the end of Washington Week, my hand would be cramped after having handwritten so many of the invaluable quotes and pearls of wisdom shared with the other 103 delegates — my friends — and myself in my official navy USSYP moleskin. But, thanks to Tiff from Pennsylvania's ingenious idea of installing a transcription service, and Max from New York's suggestion to use Otter.ai, my hand remained free from cramps, and remembering these quotes became a matter of copying and pasting. Additionally, I was so intrigued by all the speakers that my note-taking ability quickly diminished, and my record of my participation in Washington Week rests on the aforementioned quotes. Hence, the following letter will revolve around these excerpts I copied and pasted from the official transcript during the duration of Washington Week, or, per the extraordinary Ms. Rayne Guilford, "the zoom where it happens."

Of course, one of the highlights of my Washington Week was the surprise visit by President Biden, where the president imparted his experiences in the Senate, and his idea of the kind of place the Senate should be: "I was so proud of being a senator, the vice president and I both came to our current jobs in the Senate. It's a place that demands civility and requires dialogue, debate and decision." Dialogue, debate, and decision. Three seemingly simple behaviors, yet apparently — at least based off the past months — such a challenge for our hyper partisan Senate. Later in his message, President Biden noted how "36 years ago... I learned from so many of my colleagues, from red states and blue states, small states and big states...". And despite how much politics has changed since Biden became a senator, despite how divided our political landscape has become, despite how downtrodden I frequently feel regarding the future of this country, it is inspirational to be given such an example of the Senate. An example which demonstrates the unity and the friendship which can be recultivated in such a foundational element of government.

The other most meaningful presenter, for me at least, was CBS Evening News Anchor Ms. Norah O'Donnell, who was able to share such a unique perspective on not only the federal government but also the state of current affairs. In a world where so many actions are associated with a political motive, Ms. O'Donnell's steadfast neutrality and sole focus on uncovering truth for everyday citizens was simply inspiring: "Journalism is what we need to make democracy work. We need an Informed Electorate, it's so critically important." In a similar vein, Ms. O'Donnell noted the power of information: "...one of the most important things that I can do as a journalist is to try and serve the public by telling stories that change lives." Especially since the January 6th attack on the Capitol, my general optimism towards politics and the future of this country has drastically diminished. However, Norah O'Donnell's inspirational message regarding the possibilities associated with honesty and truth helped me regain more respect for our political system.

Every speaker — throughout the duration of Washington Week — inspired me to hope for a better future of this country. From the feeling of eagerness to be a role model when Mr. Kamoie said, "I work for you, because your taxes, your parents' taxes, pay my salary. And that's why whenever somebody stops me on the street to ask me a question, I'll answer, because I work for the people, and I hope you will have the opportunity as well," to the pearl which Ms. Gina McCarthy, the first ever Climate Advisor, shared: "...you're never actually going to get rich doing this, but you will have the richest life." From the opportunity to directly question Dr. Anthony Fauci about the intersectionality of public health and politics, to the meaningful and slightly comedic conversation my co-delegate, Eman Massoud, and I had with Senator Kelly. And all the insanely insightful phrases, such as Joe Manchin's, "They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care;" or the funniest interactions I had with my fellow delegates and Military Mentor group, where Grant Suire, from Louisiana replied to our Military Mentor, Major Martin, with: "There is a little bit of relief, for a Marine Corps Major, that you don't know who PewDiePie is."

To all my amazing fellow delegates, especially those in my Military Mentor group, as well as every speaker, distinguished guest, and host or coordinator of Washington Week, I leave you with some of Major Martin's words: "It's been real, it's been fun, in fact, it's been real fun." I loved meeting all of you, I hope to stay in contact with all of you. This program has played an enormous role in regaining hope for the future of this nation, and for rekindling my desire for a career in public service.

Many thanks,
Nathaniel Cross
2021 Delegate from Arizona