

## **Amanda Wills, DODEA – 2021**

Hi! My name is Amanda Wills and I am a DoDEA delegate whose home state is Florida. I go to school at Alconbury Middle High School located in Alconbury, England. At school and in the community, I am the Junior Class president, National Honor Society secretary, Model United Nations ambassador, Air Force Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (AFJROTC) squadron commander, commander of the Kitty Hawk Air Society, and a Red Cross IHL volunteer.

On February 5th, 2021, I found out I was selected to become one of two Department of Defense Education Activity's (DoDEA) delegates for the United States Senate Youth Program. I was called into our school's administrative office to join a google meet with my state contact, the DoDEA West District Superintendent, and my parents. I was ecstatic and overjoyed to be selected to attend this prestigious program and most importantly represent DoDEA. In the weeks following, I found myself counting down the days until Washington Week. Before Washington Week, I was able to contact other delegates and share experiences with a diverse array of other delegates. I also connected with my fellow DoDEA delegate to make our Roll Call of the States video, where each delegate gets to introduce themselves and their state.

As Washington Week began, I was very excited, unsure of what to expect, but looking forward to the speakers, their insight, and the opportunity to ask them questions. During the week, I was honored to ask questions to the Associate Supreme Court Justice of the United States Clarence Thomas and U.S. Ambassador to Brazil Todd Chapman. Justice Thomas provided insight about the future of Supreme Court nominations and hearings and Ambassador Chapman discussed day-to-day communications between U.S. Ambassadors and State Department Headquarters in Washington, DC. During our time speaking with Justice Clarence Thomas, we learned that if SCOTUS Chief Justice John Roberts offers you a donut, take it (this is a test to his interns to see who will take the risk of eating a messy donut in their professional attire)!

One of my favorite speakers was Ms. Norah O'Donnell who gave a great introduction about her life, journalism and answered many questions as well as giving inspirational, thoughtful stories and advice. My favorite piece of advice was 'to always give handwritten thank you notes' since it is always important to thank others personally. I liked the fact she also took the Zoom call from her desk in the CBS Studios. I also provided closing remarks and thanks following Deputy Secretary of Defense Dr. Kathleen Hicks' speech! One of the biggest surprises was President Biden sending a message to delegates congratulating them on selection as well as stating he is looking forward to delegates making a difference in America. Throughout the week the program gave us the opportunity to speak and ask questions to many United States government leaders as well as a former NASA astronaut and former captain of the International Space Station (ISS) Scott Kelley. We also got a "trip" to the International Space Station where delegates sent in pre-recorded question videos, selected by NASA, to be answered live by two U.S. astronauts currently aboard the ISS. As a NASA-enthusiast, I was excited to talk to astronauts and gain insight into their roles in the space program. Although I would have preferred being in Washington, DC to meet delegates and speakers in person, I am grateful to have experienced Washington Week virtually. I look forward to a future reunion with 2021 delegates. This experience solidified my aspirations to work for the United States government. I will forever be thankful to the program and the Hearst Foundations for providing this experience. I look forward to collaborating and staying connected with past and future alumni through the Alumni Association in years to come!