

## **Raj Mia, FL – 2021**

Hearing Mr. Steve Cox's "Delegates and distinguished guests" is something I will surely miss from Washington Week. It has been approximately 3 weeks since Washington Week ONLINE, and I can say even though it was held virtually on Zoom, I enjoyed every minute. I learned immensely from the speakers, from Justice Clarence Thomas to Dr. Sharon Milgram of the National Institutes of Health and to CBS's Norah O'Donnell. Being able to talk to sitting senators and to my fellow delegates about current events and our respective political beliefs was truly impactful.

Though throughout Washington Week we were introduced to multiple extraordinary experiences, I believe most awe-inspiring experiences was on day 4 of Washington Week. The message we received from sitting President Joe Biden; he said that we are one of the most tolerant generations ever, and we need people like you to help improve this nation, and that tolerance is at the heart of the American psyche. Having the president say that to us left me inspired for my future and of the nation's future. This is truly the "zoom where it happens", I was so happy when the president addressed us, and it's an experience that I will hold on to forever.

Another major moment that stood out amongst the rest was CBS's Norah O'Donnell and the advice she gave, alongside her take of the current political arena. What stood out to me the most was when she gave her advice: "it doesn't matter if you're the most intelligent in the room, just be the most well-read" and "it doesn't matter what you do in the company, it only matters who you worked for." These are just some pieces of advice that I will take with me as I leave this program. Ms. O'Donnell's viewpoint on gerrymandering was also insightful as well; I agreed when she said that partisanship between both ends of the spectrum has increased because of gerrymandering; simply the most extreme are getting elected and no one's reaching for the middle. I would like to thank Norah O'Donnell so much to the time and advice she devoted to us.

Furthermore, the energy and anticipation created by my fellow delegates and Military Mentor Lieutenant Commander Gillis is what truly topped off this week. The ability to have side discussions with my fellow delegates and to have insightful conversations about the future with my Military Mentor left me with optimism for my future in public service. The advice and tolerance for issues they espoused truly make me grateful to be a part of this program.

In the end, Washington Week has solidified my belief that I want to work in the public sector whether it's with the NIH or as a representative. Engaging with people of different beliefs and backgrounds was one of the best parts of Washington week. Being able to virtually visit Washington and engage with multiple speakers about how the inner workings of DC function and of their political philosophy, I cannot say enough how much I appreciate it. I would like to thank the Hearst Foundations, speakers, fellow delegates, and Military Mentor Lieutenant Commander Gillis for such a transformative week.