

Sarah George, MO – 2021

“Delegates and distinguished guests” has now become my all-time favorite phrase. To say the Mr. Steve Cox was an excellent moderator and host is an understatement. Each morning of Washington Week, I looked forward to hearing the same “delegates and distinguished guests” line because, at its core, it represented what the program was all about: the delegates and the distinguished guests. Indeed, having the prestigious privilege of meeting world leaders and ambassadors was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

But, beyond the professional interactions I had with the guest speakers, the most captivating moments were captured when a delegate was chosen to unmute themselves and ask a question. From asking Supreme Court Associate Justice Clarence Thomas about the importance of racial representation in the judicial lens to asking a National Institutes of Health (NIH) director about the organization’s strides towards reducing readmission rates during the 21st century, I discovered the true meaning of service and leadership.

As a STEM-oriented student with a passion for activism and public speaking, I found March 16th to be the highlight of my Washington Week. That Tuesday, delegates were exposed to key healthcare leaders like NIH Director, Dr. Francis Collins, and Chief Medical Advisor to the President, Dr. Anthony Fauci. Even though I am firmly focused on becoming a medical professional in my career, I always had trouble explaining how civic service could play a major role in my passion. Once I met Dr. Collins and Dr. Fauci, I knew exactly how I could be not only a civic servant but also a practicing doctor. Each provided thorough and enthralling insights into how the intersectionality of medicine is ever evolving, illuminating new paths for future medical professionals entering the field. Specifically, Dr. Collins posited that “we have to shoulder the responsibility for global health,” highlighting the importance of diplomacy in international preventive medicine. In addition, Dr. Fauci furthered the sentiment about youth being involved in medical awareness by detailing the necessity of educating younger generations, worldwide, about the usage of masks during the COVID-19 pandemic. Both professionals were calm, collected, and, even more impressive, authentic to themselves. Witnessing their mere knowledge, wit, and charisma greatly inspired my post-secondary medical pursuits.

My favorite public speaker and orator had to be the legendary CBS News Anchor Ms. Norah O’Donnell. As a female interested in going to a male-dominated industry, I was absolutely captivated by her powerful intelligence, confidence, and ability to capture a virtual Zoom session’s attention simply by her words. She started beginning her session with tokens of wisdom she has accumulated over the course of her career, which I still live by to this day. One piece of advice stood out to me: The company that you work for matters more than you know. The American journalist has built a credible reputation in the news industry, and I was taken aback when she said these words because it wasn’t what I was expecting. As she later explained her reasoning, I was completely shocked at the mere life knowledge and experience the news anchor had. She would later explain to us that reputation is built off our interactions and our environment. Her honesty was refreshing because she didn’t have to share these tokens of wisdom with these high school students. Yet, she made it her mission to ensure that the future generations of American leaders would build their own authentic reputation, from the ground up, with proper advice and guidance.

“Delegates and distinguished guests” is a phrase that not only radiates professionalism but also hints at the beautiful relations that were formed between leaders of America and youth. The United States Youth Senate Program expanded my network to 104 friends and delegates. More importantly, the program reinstated that my purpose is to serve others. I am truly honored to be the 59th Missouri delegate at the annual United States Youth Senate Program. So, for the final time, I will close this essay with the iconic: “Delegates and distinguished guests,” thank you all for the ride of a lifetime.