

## Sri Jaladi, MO – 2021

When I originally found out that I was a Senate Youth Delegate, I was filled with excitement about the prospect of having a front-row seat and simultaneously gaining a better insight into the workings of our government. When the program announced that it would be shifting online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I was rather nervous as to how well such an incredible in-person experience could be transferred online. However, as I got to meet other amazing delegates through various communication mediums prior to Washington Week, I knew that Washington Week would be a once-in-a-lifetime experience. And it was! The combination of the dedicated Senate Youth staff, the incredible transition they made to switch the program virtually and maintain its experiences, and the remarkable other delegates made for an unforgettable week.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, Ms. Norah O'Donnell, and Mr. Scott Kelly were a few of my favorite speakers during Washington Week. As someone who has been interested in the utilization of media to create positive change, Ms. Norah O'Donnell was incredibly inspirational to listen to. Ms. O'Donnell said, "information is powerful," and "one of the most important things [she] can do as a journalist is to try and serve the public by telling stories that change lives." Listening to Ms. O'Donnell it was clear her work has been exactly that: serving the public and changing lives. It was heartwarming to listen to how Ms. O'Donnell serves the public through a more unique avenue of journalism. When Ms. O'Donnell interviewed Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the first question she asked was, "did you order the murder of Jamal Khashoggi?" Ms. O'Donnell told us she did this, despite the risks, because "it was the *right* thing to do." The bravery and courage that Ms. O'Donnell showed in her service was truly inspirational to listen to and was one of the most moving moments of Washington Week for myself.

One of the components of the Senate Youth Program I most cherished, and continue to cherish, are the other delegates that I had the opportunity to meet and connect with. Even though these introductions to other delegates around the nation were done through Discord and Zoom, they didn't diminish my amazement in speaking with the other delegates. Having the opportunity to learn about each and every person, their story, their state, and their ideas was an experience I know I will never get anywhere else. Even though all these connections may have been created online, they were, and are, no less meaningful. The late-night Zoom sessions were amazing to get to meet so many new individuals in such a short amount of time. I continue to speak with many delegates and be amazed as to their achievements and ideas.

I cannot fully verbalize how much I appreciated the opportunity and honor to be a Senate Youth delegate and all the experiences, connections, and information that the Senate Youth Program provided to myself and the other delegates. Above all, I cannot thank the other delegates and staff who made the online Senate Youth experience just as amazing as it would have been in-person. I know that the connections and friendships I developed with other delegates and the information that I learned during this experience will remain with me throughout my future. In continuation of my excitement when I was originally named a Senate Youth delegate, I am also now just as excited to see and witness the incredible things that Senate Youth delegates of 2021 will do in the future.