

## **Archer Taylor, MS - 2021**

“The sky is not the limit.”

These words were spoken by Captain Scott Kelly in the very first keynote address of the program, and, for me, set the tone of the rest of the days to come. This year we faced a challenge unseen by any of the other delegates in years past: the challenge of attending the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) virtually through Zoom. From this challenge came a reward of immeasurable value: advice earned from over a decades' worth of experience by speakers such as Clarence Thomas, Betty Koed, Robert Henry, Todd Chapman, and more. The ability to talk to and hear from these speakers is truly unparalleled by any other event in my life, and it was extraordinary to learn more about our government straight from the source.

There were so many speakers that I would consider “best” speakers that it does them no justice to name one in particular. I really enjoyed hearing from Todd Chapman, the U.S. Ambassador to Brazil, and learning more about how the United States maintains its relations with Brazil, seeks new avenues of creating peace, as well as provides support for American citizens living abroad. I enjoyed his session so much that I really wish I could go back and hear some more from him. Along with Ambassador Chapman, Ms. Norah O'Donnell, a CBS news anchor, was among the top of my list in regards to speakers. Ms. O'Donnell was very insightful with her responses to our questions, and I genuinely enjoyed the sense of humor that mixed in with her answers as well as hearing some of the stories she has collected from being a journalist. I thought her story about interviewing the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia in regards to the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi really showed how brave she was but also how interesting being a journalist is. I don't want to take up too much space talking about all my favorite speakers but also at the top of my list were Dr. Sharon Milgram, Judge Robert Henry, Mr. Brian Kamoie, and Senators Lankford and Baldwin.

The delegates this year, in place of the annual Senate Reception, got to talk with the senators from their state via a Zoom call. For me, that means talking with Senator Roger Wicker and Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith. Talking with them was one of the highlights of the whole program for me. I very much enjoyed hearing both of their backstories as well as their responses to the questions that me and my co-delegate asked. One would expect members of Congress to always have their “press voice” on but I found both of the Senators to be very personable and friendly. From this, I can say that I genuinely enjoyed talking to both of them, even if it wasn't in person like normal.

Even though it was virtual this year, I can say without a doubt, Washington Week ONLINE was a life-changing experience. I originally thought I wanted to become an engineer, but after hearing some of the remarks by speakers such as Ambassador Chapman, I have started to consider other opportunities such as international relations, defense policy, and the foreign service. Along with this, having the opportunity to collaborate with delegates who are also interested in the politics just added to the experience. I know that it was tough for the USSYP staff, but I am so thankful for them for setting this up. I truly learned a lot and I will say never forget this program.