

Neil Kachappilly, NH – 2021

“Delegates and distinguished guests...” comes through my laptop speakers from the booming voice of our beloved Mr. Steve Cox. Immediately, I find myself sitting a bit straighter, adjusting my tie, phone away—ready for the event. Each session began along similar lines but each held its own, uniquely wonderful experience. Each one provided unforgettable memories, each left its own impact. From the moment I was welcomed into the delegation’s group chat to the speakers to the farewell address, it was a jam-packed, stimulating, and inspiring experience.

Despite all the renowned speakers and professional events, my most valuable takeaway might lie with the 2021 delegation, who I have joined in forming a community that will stay together for years to come. In today’s virtual world, a lack of face-to-face interaction seems like a problem, but this group was able to overcome that challenge and form a close bond nonetheless. Starting with the Facebook group and now a discord server filled with channels holding constant lively discussion, the 2021 delegation has made the most of its situation. It has become a place to engage in respectful, engaging debate. It has become a place to share both our joy and sadness with our peers. It brings together both like-minded peers as well as significantly different people. With delegates from each of the 50 states, each carries with them their own unique background and experiences. They bring their own stories to tell, and their own opinions. Personally, this has helped me achieve my premier goal for USSYP—to broaden my horizons so as to include other perspectives while I develop my own informed opinions. A second personal goal, however, was achieved outside this group: learning from the experience of accomplished professionals.

While headlined by Associate Justice of the Supreme Court Clarence Thomas and even a video appearance from the president himself, each member of this thoroughly entertaining speaker lineup provided me with important insight and enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of our government and its inner workings. I even had the honor of asking a question to the Director of the National Institutes of Health, Dr. Francis Collins. I will never forget the moment where it felt like a casual conversation with one of the most influential people in our country. His answer, like all the others, was specific and thorough, painting as clear a picture as he could. Each speaker took the time to give us their honest thoughts and help us understand their point of view. To pick a favorite is a challenging task, but Associate Justice Thomas proved to be the most awe-inspiring of them all. As he took us through his own journey and spoke liberally about his various beliefs, I was deeply intrigued by the opportunity to delve into such an esteemed justice’s mind.

While Washington Week only lasted the four days, the experience I gained is here to stay. Beyond the program itself, I am overjoyed to know that I now have my new USSYP friends by my side. The impact of this program reaches every aspect of my life, and I could not be more grateful to have been granted this opportunity, one that I will cherish far into the future.