

Tyler Moore, PA - 2021

For years through Future Business Leaders of America I had seen numerous individuals across the country be selected for this prestigious program. I had only dreamt of being one of the individuals to travel to Washington, seeing and meeting the public figures we see on a daily basis. The time came to apply this past year, and quite frankly I have zero regret; it is the best experience of my life thus far and it has changed the way I perceive life.

It was unfortunate that the program had to be virtual. I think it would have been much more empowering to be there in person, the city where it all happens, and to personally meet the speakers and fellow delegates. I think what Justice Thomas said summarizes this disappointing feeling perfectly. "Focus on the things you can control," he said. This was when I knew the Washington Week experience would be life-changing. While I was initially excited to hear from such high-profile figures, I did not yet know what exactly I would hear. I would be hearing from brutally honest and open national leaders who did not have to worry about what the public or media heard; they were speaking to us, future leaders, and knew their words and truthfulness would matter.

Two speakers particularly stuck out to me: Justice Clarence Thomas and Ms. Norah O'Donnell. The speaker I had looked forward to hearing most was Justice Thomas. I have always held great interest in and respect for the Supreme Court, which does not take its nickname "the least dangerous branch" lightly. Justice Thomas is reputable for being quiet and not the most popular to society. I was looking forward to seeing if this was true for his conversation with us at Washington Week. Justice Thomas, in all actuality, was incredibly personable and willing to dive into deep questions. He had a story and he wanted to share that story. He taught life lessons that stick with me (quote above) and shape how I perceive the world. Norah O'Donnell, on the other hand, was a speaker that I had no knowledge of prior to the conference. After her incredible discussion with us, I am now debating adding a double major or minor in a journalism or communications field. I learned how crucial journalism is to our everyday lives, whether good or bad. Journalism is essentially the fourth branch of the government, and as Ms. O'Donnell said, there is a reason it is listed first in the Bill of Rights. I think what intrigued me the most was how attentive and open Ms. O'Donnell was. She wanted to know each of us. She wrote our names and questions down on the paper in front of her. Not to mention, she had the coolest setting for her speech, sitting at the CBS Evening News desk. The biggest take away from her: "Why should I be afraid of someone who is afraid of me?"

The overall experience of Washington Week is unmatched and one of a kind. It is something that very few people in our world will ever experience. I have been given the opportunity to partake in a program so important that the United States Senate has made sure it has stayed in existence for the past fifty-nine years. My sincerest gratitude goes to the United States Senate, the Hearst Foundations, and everyone involved in this life changing opportunity for high school students like myself.