

Xuechen Yin, TX – 2021

I was greeted with a welcome surprise when I opened my spam folder one day. My heart thudded against my chest as I scrambled to open the email—I was one of the two delegates chosen to represent the Great State of Texas in the United States Senate Youth Program.

Due to the pandemic, Washington Week was to be hosted online, and I questioned, just like every one of my fellow delegates, how the Hearst Foundations and organizers of the program would create an engaging and informative program despite its online context. The month before the program date passed quickly, and again, I was greeted with many welcome surprises.

My fellow Texas delegate and I received the amazing opportunity to chat with the senators that represent my state on a day-to-day basis, Ted Cruz and John Cornyn. From debating the merits and disadvantages of school choice in our education system with Senator Cruz to discussing the ideals Senator Cornyn held that led him to a career in public service, I learned a great deal about the strenuous, yet fulfilling job of serving our community, our state, and our country.

As Washington Week ONLINE progressed, the excitement built up within me. Each speaker presented ideas, beliefs, and thoughts that differed from each other in ideology and emphasis. The hours seemed to pass so quickly—I often found myself wishing I could freeze time just to get one more question or one tidbit of information that would inform my perspective on our government, our institutions, our world. For instance, I was given the incredible opportunity to give closing remarks for Astronaut Scott Kelly, who lives a mere three hours away from me in Houston, TX. As someone who had, just the day before, spent hours in debate rounds concerning our country's technological and military involvement in space, speaking to an astronaut who'd been instrumental in not only domestic, but international technological development, helped me realize the magnitude of the issues I debated.

The time spent at the end of the day with my Military Mentor, Lt. Commander Concepcion, and my group put everything into perspective. Discussing these issues pertinent to our country with my fellow delegates with widely ranging perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences gave me a greater depth of understanding of the world we live in.

The endless discourse at Washington Week, whether with speakers, my Military Mentor, or my group, inspired me, and as I witnessed their love for and dedication to our country, I pledged to devote my time and energy to cultivating the future generations that, just like me and my fellow delegates, will determine the direction of our world.