

## **Emma Romano, WV - 2021**

This year may have been different compared to past United State Senate Youth Programs, but aspects to the program would not have been implemented without being exposed to our current situation. Without the pandemic we would have been unable to hear the perspectives of Dr. Fauci and without the current international relations insight from the State Department, the discussions wouldn't have been as prominent. Lastly, staying home allowed us exposure to the social construct of race and the need for environmental sustainability facilitating discussions with the Harvard Student Body President Noah Harris and White House Climate Advisor Ms. Gina McCarthy.

Dr. Fauci was a very insightful speaker for many reasons beyond the infectious disease world. Dr. Fauci has perspective into a world many regular citizens don't understand and he is leading America into an era most haven't experienced. His experience and candor on the Covid-19 pandemic brought a clear and straightforward message - that we must continue to remain vigilant and in front of this pandemic.

Foreign Economics Officer Manuela Hernandez was my favorite speaker from the State Department because she highlighted key elements needed for diplomatic relations including in the environmental area. Since I am hoping to be an environmental lawyer in the nonprofit sector, Ms. Hernandez has me seriously considering a diplomacy position focusing on environmental sustainability. With organizations such as the Civil Society Working Group, which focuses on environmental racism and bettering the planet which will support indigenous populations health, it is an area I would like to focus on.

Being home the whole year has opened our eyes to the racial injustices occurring around the world and Student Body President Noah Harris gave raw answers to the delegates about the injustices that marginalized communities are experiencing. This year it started with Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, so Mr. Harris took action by raising hundreds of thousands of dollars for black solidarity groups in the area. He and his team also encouraged the surrounding community to donate on their own as well. Mr. Harris has evoked change at Harvard that most cannot do throughout their entire lives while also being an inspiration to the next generation of leaders.

Last, and certainly not the least, Ms. Gina McCarthy who has been an unbelievable trail blazer in the environmental sustainability sector. I have been studying the environment for only five short years, yet being faced with the impending facts I have become pessimistic on the outlook of our society. I am also unable to convey to other individuals the urgency of the climate crisis without being deemed "a bummer." Ms. McCarthy has changed my perspective on what it means to be an intersectional climate justice seeker - to be optimistic. Where Ms. McCarthy sees climate crisis, she sees opportunity and innovation. Opportunity and innovation to create new jobs, a stable economy, rebuilding our society fundamentally to provide equally for all communities and a sustainable future for generations to come. I am very thankful for the privilege to hear Ms. McCarthy's perspectives and it has forever changed my approach to the climate crisis.

This week has given me insight into the world and individuals around me by understanding differences and how we can make each other stronger by bringing them together. Thank you to the committee who made this virtual week possible and my Military Mentor Captain Tony Starks who engaged the group in civil discourse on the most pressing topics today.