

Olivia Hindman, WV — 2021

The United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) was like a breath of fresh air for me. In the last year, we have all faced and seen a lot of darkness and cruelty. Our nation has become increasingly polarized and more divided. Despite all that, a sense of hope came over me while participating in Washington Week ONLINE. Hope for the future of our country. Hope for unity and working together to solve problems. I think back to what Senior Director for Preparedness Policy on the White House National Security Staff, Brian Kamoie, asked us, “What is it that you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” While I do not know what each and every delegate plans to go onto do, I do know that every delegate will make our world and our country a better place.

Being able to be in “the Zoom where it happens” and to get to know the leaders of tomorrow from all over our country was truly inspirational. The other delegates and I have had a unique experience that no other group of delegates has had. While we all wish Washington Week could have been held in person, we are extremely thankful for the online program during unprecedented times. We were able to hear and learn from experts and leaders that others only dream of talking to. We were able to connect with each other in daily Zooms. Starting the day and wrapping up the day in our Military Mentor groups was extremely valuable to me. Lieutenant Commander Concepcion facilitated a safe and open space for me and all my co-delegates to talk on a deeper level. Those conversations were so valuable, and I am so grateful for the strong bond that I have formed with my co-delegates. Washington Week was one of the best weeks of my life!

To me, one of the biggest takeaways was the advice that all the different speakers offered to us delegates. Here are some highlights of the extremely insightful advice that they shared with us. Former astronaut Scott Kelly: “focus on the things you can control.” Senate historian Betty Koed: “counter the bad information with good information.” Justice Clarence Thomas: “take the road less traveled,” and “you are obligated to think and to keep learning.” Astronaut Victor Glover: “It is important for young people to learn.” Dr. Francis Collins: “If there was ever a time to do it, it’s now.” CBS News Anchor Norah O’Donnell: “the quality of your life is determined by how you treat others,” and “seek information rather than affirmation.” Principal Deputy Spokesperson of the State Department Jalina Porter: “do things that feed your soul.” Hearing all of the leaders’ and experts’ inspirational stories has encouraged me to work harder and be the best possible leader I can be.

My two favorite speakers from the entire week were Dr. Francis Collins and Norah O’Donnell. Dr. Francis Collins has always been an inspiration of mine for his work on the human genome project. Getting to hear him speak was so surreal and a dream come true. It was interesting and motivating for me to hear how he balances science and his faith. I also found what he had to say about the human genome project and COVID-19 exceptionally enthralling. Norah O’Donnell talked to us about the importance of seeking information and finding the facts on a matter. She told us about her experiences and the importance of the press. She was extremely personable, energetic, and engaging when she spoke with us. It was so neat when she shared her ideas for a book she plans to write one day. All of the speakers really resonated with me, but Dr. Collins and Norah O’Donnell spoke to me on a much deeper level.

I am so honored to have been selected for and to participate in the 59th United States Senate Youth Program. Washington Week was a life-changing experience for me. I realize just how much it affected my life more and more each day. I know this experience and the people that I have met will have a lasting impact on my life. I plan to carry with me the knowledge that I learned during Washington Week, apply it to all things that I do, and build on that knowledge, in order to leave the greatest possible impact. I am thankful that the Hearst Foundations enabled me to have this opportunity. I cannot wait to see how the 2021 delegates change and impact the world