

Frances Stroud, CO – 2022

In her keynote address, Senator Susan Collins articulated how all 102 delegates felt all of Washington Week: shock and disbelief that the moment we had all been fantasizing about for months had finally arrived. She noted the enthusiasm in our eyes and the scribble of our pens, scrambling to document every single moment. Senator Collins perfectly described how we all felt, not through observation, but through reminiscing on her own experience serving as Maine's delegate in 1971. At a time when female leadership was scarce in the Senate, a young Susan Collins' life was changed forever when she met the woman who occupied the seat she would one day hold. Senator Collins' career tells the story of bipartisanship, integrity, and service, and she explained that the lessons I would learn, the knowledge I would soak up, and the people I would meet throughout Washington Week would profoundly change my life. She was completely right.

Milliseconds after I opened my acceptance email, I sprinted down the halls of my high school to share the news with my teacher who sponsors the organization I founded at my school, Women Empowerment and Equality. We discussed at length all the potential speakers I would hear from; and when the official schedule came out, we fangirled over all of them. Although I anticipated my favorite speakers would be Associate Attorney General Vanita Gupta and Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield, I could never have imagined the life-lasting impact these powerhouse women would have on me.

First working passionately as the Deputy Legal Director and the Director of the Center for Justice at the American Civil Liberties Union where she *sued* the government, to then working on *behalf* of the government as the chief civil rights prosecutor and then Associate Attorney General, Ms. Gupta conveyed the complexities of social justice, and how there are many lanes from which young, aspiring lawyers can make a difference. Discussing the advances and setbacks in the history of civil rights law, and her experience fighting for justice on the local and national level confirmed my intent to pursue further education in law and social justice.

As Washington Week progressed and my USSYP notebook was filling up with my every thought from the week, the next speaker who truly shaped my perspective of a future career in service was Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield. Recounting her career in fighting for global human rights and working to mitigate and prevent refugee crises, Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield imparted lessons themed of integrity. She divulged the skills that allow for strong and steadfast negotiation and conflict resolution, explained the necessity courage to pursue what others deem impossible, but most notably shared a moment of vulnerability where she stated that one of the most difficult aspects of her career was finding balance with her family.

After discussing policy issues with my senators one on one, engaging in a State Department Simulation, and hearing from individuals in our government who are changing the world, I know that the lessons I learned from the Senate Youth Program will continue to shape my journey in public service and social justice for the rest of my life.