

Seamus Oliver, DE - 2022

At its most fundamental level, politics is about stories. Voters search for policy positions that reflect their experiences. Authors and political journalists thrive on chronicling the actions of those in power. Parties and news organizations get what they want by creating the best narrative explaining where the country is going. Candidates spend thousands of dollars crafting their life story to appear relatable to the average voter. Unfortunately, the exercise of storytelling is far easier than materially improving the lives of the American people, so it can seem like politicians spend much more time doing the former than the latter. Washington Week was a chance to peel back the curtain and interact with the people that hold office, not the stories that they present.

This meant that the week was full of fascinating Zoom calls. Important figures were asked about their proudest moments and what they had learned from a lifetime in office. My interactions with Delaware Senators Chris Coons and Tom Carper made it clear that politics is never as simple as it may initially seem, and it brought a newfound respect for how many fields are necessary to help our country succeed. Just as importantly, I had the chance to watch as the speakers were asked about their mistakes and missteps. Washington Week challenged me to consider that I couldn't dismiss these speakers out of hand because of their previous errors, as they often acknowledged them on their own and spoke about how they were doing their best to correct them.

Just as interesting as the formal program, if not more, were my fellow delegates. In my Roll Call of the States video, I expressed interest in learning the strange quirks of everyone's local politics, and I absolutely wasn't disappointed. This year's cohort was incredibly well rounded, and I'd be hard pressed to find another group that could talk with as much depth on the inner workings of the Louisiana state legislature, the specifics of activism in Minnesota, the practical results of education policy in Virginia, and the value of institutional respect in judicial politics in the space of a single conversation. Our Zoom calls extended well into the night, and I was consistently impressed by how well everyone could express nuanced answers to some of the most complex questions of the modern day. The connections I made at Washington Week have already led to in-person meetups, a surprisingly detailed tour of Boston, zealous debates, and friendships that I expect will last a lifetime.