

Miles Wang, FL – 2022

Many programs advertise themselves as a transformative, life-changing experience. While it is exceptionally rare for that promise to be kept, I can comfortably say that Washington Week lived up to its name and exceeded my expectations. Over the course of a single week, I delved into the intricacies of public service, met with America's current and future leaders, and chowed down on a chocolate Capitol. It is an understatement to say that the opportunity to attend this program transformed my worldview and my future goals.

With a schedule packed with impactful and respectful speakers, I learned from every one of the speaking engagements. It was a pleasure to hear from Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield. She shared words of wisdom about the Foreign Service and forming relationships behind closed doors. I learned about how when interests are divergent and oppositional, diplomats must develop relationships based on honesty and trust. With negotiations being complex and precarious, she explained her mindset when dealing with difficult situations is to put her head in a future time, where the issue is already resolved, to keep perspective. This speaking engagement was particularly topical regarding the war in Ukraine, and she gave incisive insight in answering my question about energy independence in the West and unity in the global security architecture. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg's engagement was also memorable. I was fortunate enough to be able to ask him a question about the future of the Highway Trust Fund's finances given the prospects of an EV-dominated market, and he answered with a striking level of big-picture thinking and deep knowledge about transportation issues.

I particularly enjoyed the Department of State's Diplomacy Simulation — an interactive way to apply the skills we learned and to understand the importance and complexity of negotiation. When split up into stakeholder groups during the Suez Canal crisis, the simulation pushed us to navigate through delicate situations and attempt to uphold the interests of the country we were representing. The negotiations were entertaining, chaotic, and above all else, enriching.

The military mentor meetings were a reflective way of ending each day. Meeting with the fantastic Captain Tobergate and the rest of the "Declaration Defenders" enabled us to process what we learned and explore new issues. Captain T fostered insightful discussion about timely topics and offered book recommendations based on our interests in the world.

While the activities and speakers of Washington Week were enrapturing, my fellow delegates were just as interesting. Each delegate came from diverse backgrounds and held distinct viewpoints — although we often disagreed on issues, we did so with a deep respect for each other's values and ideas. Through military mentor meetings, group chat conversations, and calls after the day was over, we were able to stay connected even with a virtual format.

While my specific future plans are still up for grabs, the U.S. Senate Youth Program has cemented my conviction to serve my community. I could not be more grateful for this opportunity to explore the inner workings of America's highest offices.