

Enji Himoya, HI – 2022

An online masterclass would typically cost a hefty sum in subscription fees, but the United States Senate Youth Program was free and also came with a generous reward. The program, similar to the online education subscription platform, featured experts from various fields who shared their knowledge and involvement on topics affecting both domestic and global affairs. Despite meeting virtually, the experience allowed me to engage in insightful discussions with individuals and professionals who share my passion, making it truly immersive.

Although it was tempting to be awestruck by the keynote speakers, it was my duty, not only as a delegate but also as a contributing member of society, to ask meaningful questions and hold our leaders accountable. Meeting the United Nations Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield and NATO Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy Carmen Romero was a true honor and privilege. Following recent international relations events, both expressed strong assurances about the West's commitment to protecting its interests and allies. Priorities, on the other hand, were distinguishable. Ms. Carmen Romero called for greater efforts to combat misinformation about the Ukrainian conflict, whereas Ambassador Greenfield, rightly, emphasized the U.S. position on the issue and the protection of American interests.

Furthermore, in relation to American foreign policy, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley shared similar views with Ambassador Greenfield. But, General Milley stressed the importance of what we can do as youth through service. Gen. Milley's demeanor struck me as stern and pragmatic, as befitting a leader of a body that advises the President on military and policy matters. His call to service reflects such demeanor, that as youth, our aspirations can and should work together to create a positive impact in the community, whether through service in the armed forces or private life.

The most compelling interaction during Washington Week, however, has to be with Judge Robert Henry, to whom I had the honor of asking a question. Listening to Judge Henry's impassioned remarks on the Constitution was inspiring particularly as it related to establishing the rule of law, which grants many of our social liberties. He also expressed his thoughts on growing divides in our country, implying passionately that America is in a fight for its life. I believe the fight is to find our collective identity as a nation guided by the principles laid out in the Constitution, which has been heavily debated and revised over the years. Such debate and revisions may have contributed to widespread divisions, so I asked Judge Henry if he believed ambiguities in the Constitution's provisions contribute to our nation's social discourse.

Despite its qualms, I believe that meeting virtually for the United States Senate Youth Program was a successful experience that opens up new opportunities for inviting more prominent guest speakers. The accessibility of virtual meetings allows guests to join remotely at any location and is certainly something that should be incorporated into future Washington Week events regardless of how we meet, making it easier to get a hold of officials who could share useful insight but find it difficult to join the program at a specified venue. Moreover, the true experience of the program is found in the fellowship of my fellow delegates, and despite the financial incentives, I believe the true reward is in the bond we shared and continue to share as like-minded individuals passionate about making a difference in the world.