

## Lexi Duffy, IA – 2022

*We The People of the United States.* Spoken to 104 delegates by the likes of Senate Historian Betty Koed, Judge Robert H. Henry, and former Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, this introductory line of the Preamble has been at the core of my experiences in Washington Week and the interactions adjacent to it. The phrase gracefully weaved its way into my conversations, notes, and perceptions of government. Mostly, it shaped my belief of the long-reaching impacts of the United States Senate Youth Program. Rather than a singular week in March of 2022, it is a lifelong community of the individuals that make up *We the People*.

Washington Week presented itself as a full agenda, something that is no small feat under the confines of Zoom. Further, this packed agenda centered around an impressive range of speakers, each of which had a tangible impact on the goals I have for my future and the values I hold myself to. U.S. Senator Chris Coons, for example, attested to his commitment to local government. Former Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy placed importance in the idea that the Supreme Court is of the people, not of the government. Betty Koed, the Senate Historian, urged us to study the past, not predict the future. Because of these interactions and bits of advice, I have a renewed commitment to public service and a stronger sense of my role as an individual.

Moreover, Washington Week would have been far from smooth without the guiding and advising of those behind the scenes and Zoom screens. This week was shaped by the grit, patience, and quick-thinking of Rayne Guilford, Lynn DeSmet, and Caroline Berver. While the knowledgeable speakers provided a plethora of insightful and inspiring material, these women, the Hearst Foundations, and their counterparts were evenly matched in passing down advice and wisdom. I am indebted to the likes of Lt. Nathan Borders, Jakub Mosur, and Tech Admin #2 for their never-ending assistance and support. Further even, I would be remiss to leave out my gratitude for Senators Joni Ernst and Chuck Grassley for their time, honesty, and conversation.

Even with speakers, presentations, and interactive simulations, the true power of Washington Week is most wholly seen in the delegates and relationships that bloom between them. Whether I was questioning the philosophy of happiness with a kind-hearted Minnesotan delegate, co-hosting a delegate awards night with a quick-thinking delegate from Rhode Island, or sharing a laugh with my fellow Iowan delegate, it was at these times when I felt the power and potential of the curious souls around me. There is no doubt that the delegates brought together for the purpose of Washington Week are smart, ambitious, and talented. Yet, even more, they are patient, kind, imaginative, inquisitive, creative, compromising, and understanding. It is in these delegates that I find community and a renewed hope for the direction of this nation.

In a time in which communities are tested by distance, illness, or strife, the community of the United States Senate Youth Program has been a constant in my life. This program and community has not been confined to that of messaging platforms. It has not been limited to the raising of a Zoom hand. It has and will continue to exist in the delegate meetings, the shared college tours, and the unending ways our path will cross in the future. I am so fortunate to have been a part of such a community that so gracefully exhibits that power, strength, and possibility of *We the People*.