

Tracy McKittrick, IN – 2022

During Washington Week, I had the honor of spending four days with some of the brightest students in our nation. I heard from so many figures who play significant roles in American life. I carefully absorbed the wisdom they bestowed upon all of us.

Former Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy dispensed thoughtful advice and insights on how morality and the judicial system intersect and are often synonymous with each other. Justice Kennedy brilliantly stated that we are constantly striving to discover the definition of liberty. Courts are one of our most important vessels of discovery because of the human eyes they provide to laws once thought inscrutable.

United Nations Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield spoke about the value of keeping an open mind. She advised us to develop relationships with adversaries and allies alike, to travel the world so we can learn from others. Our pasts do not define our futures, she reminded us. We need to live in the present in order to overcome life's most stressful moments, thinking to the future and taking the opportunities we are given. She also highlighted how Americans have an obligation to defend democracy abroad, even if it results in a few sacrifices.

One of my favorite activities from Washington Week was the Interactive Diplomacy Simulation, where delegates broke into separate teams to represent different countries during the Suez Canal Crisis of 1956 and worked to create a solution. I truly believe, even in the few short hours of the activity, I strengthened my skills as a negotiator and teammate - both vital elements of success.

We received a behind-the-scenes look at the White House Communications office from Press Assistant Michael Kikukawa. In a truly neat moment during the Zoom, we caught a glimpse of Press Secretary Jen Psaki and she waved to us.

A week before Washington Week commenced, delegates were sent a large box containing treats and memorabilia to commemorate their experience. Contained within this box was a white chocolate replica of the Capitol Dome. When eating these white chocolate domes, we had a ceremony and several delegates gave speeches describing what the Capitol means to them. I had the honor of giving one such speech, explaining how I believe the Capitol is an important icon which serves as one of the most poignant places of progress in America.

Additionally, I had the outstanding honor of introducing Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, who was our final keynote speaker of the program. This is, unquestionably, the highlight of Washington Week for me and will likely go down as one of the highlights of my life. Secretary Buttigieg, like all the speakers, was incredibly gracious as he answered our questions about the future of transportation and infrastructure, especially as climate change forces us to rethink the ways we travel.

Washington Week was a delightful experience and being present was an absolute privilege, opening the door to new possibilities. Each question my fellow delegates asked was smart, well-crafted, and intelligently considered. I am also grateful for the scholarship which helps me in pursuing my college education. Most importantly, I could not be more grateful to the people who dedicated the time and effort to organize this wonderful event.