

Peter Banyas, MD – 2022

Delegates and distinguished guests, how do we form a more perfect union? By getting to know the humans who serve in the institutions of these United States. As I listened to some of our nation's brightest and most influential minds, I was in awe. These people, who have been entrusted with the United States, are driven, joyful, solemn, and passionate. It was an honor to meet them.

In my mind, this program began on a day of firsts — March 1st, President Biden's first official State of the Union, the first day of my tennis tryouts, the first day of my school district's mask-optional policy, and most importantly: the first day that I picked up the beautiful USSYP journal. I had no idea that my speed notetaking during the SOTU was foreshadowing a week of 40 pages per day. Every drop of ink chronicles the messages and personalities of America's leaders, as well as their profound impact upon me.

Each speaker, from different branches of government, offered a unique perspective on American governance. And when taken together, *E Pluribus Unum*, I found a dedicated group of leaders who shared a firm commitment to these United States. Many speakers echoed the refrain of reducing polarization, but I was thrilled that we continued the conversation into my Military Mentor Group. With a group of friendly and knowledgeable delegates from across the US, we pinned down the specific intractable causes, and wrestled with the consequences of some strategies to counteract polarization.

Perhaps the most surreal moment was asking the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Mark Milley, about the role of the US military in protecting vulnerable nations—amidst the Russian invasion of Ukraine. His ability to explain President Putin's decision-making calculus, as well as the pressures upon the world order, astounded me. It's easy to assume that leaders we disagree with are irrational. But regardless of party, nationality, or ideology, it's clear that there are always histories that drive events. And although the world is at a perilous moment, this cross-section of American leadership gives me hope for the present. This cross-section of American student delegates gives me hope for the future.

This week has inspired in me the desire to carry on a legacy. I'd like to intelligently articulate countless topics like Senator Chris Coons. I hope to stay committed to bipartisanship like Senator Susan Collins. I want to extrapolate the Constitutional fundamentals like Justice Kennedy. And I aspire to understand the nuanced history of global geopolitics like General Mark Milley.

For the rest of my life, this journal will represent a week of wisdom and inspiration.

Always in appreciation,

Peter Banyas
Maryland Delegate - 2022