

## **Melaina Springer, MT – 2022**

“To create a more perfect union.” These words were ones we heard many times over the course of the four-day program. Each speaker had a unique take on how we should all work towards a more perfect union. However, what connected all of the distinguished individual’s conversations with us was the emphasis on respect of and collaboration with others. In a nation that is currently facing issues of polarization and divisiveness, we were reminded to listen to others, even those whose opinions differ from our own.

Former Senator Cory Gardner spoke with us in the evening session of the first day of the program. I found him to be very enthusiastic and encouraging, and believe he was a great speaker to start off the week. He emphasized that one should be “firm in principles and flexible in details.” There is a difference between principles and strategy, and they should not be held on the same level. Realizing that someone can have contrasting principles and strategies from yourself and not be a “bad” person was something the former Senator asserted throughout his time with us. Being able to recognize our differences and still have a civil conversation with someone was what Mr. Gardner emphasized would allow us to contribute to a more perfect union.

Dr. Betty Koed spoke to us during the second day of the program. She reiterated that it is up to us, the people of the United States, to form a more perfect union. She told us of three lesser-known Senators who had made long lasting impactful differences. She insisted that individuals matter, and each of us has a role to play. Lasting change takes a long time, and you should by no means give up even if you’ve failed. Her final words to us were to “look for a more perfect union” as these three individuals did.

My personal favorite speaker was Ms. Carmen Romero. She is the Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy of NATO. She began her time with us discussing the history of NATO and her role within the conglomeration of superpowers. She said the number one duty of NATO is to keep people safe and keep the peace. Once we were able to start asking questions, many of us were curious as to how NATO would be handling the crisis in Ukraine. She emphasized how the organization would be focusing on trying to stop the war, not expand it. This is why NATO would not enforce a no-fly zone, and why they’re focusing on humanitarian support. When asked what the future of NATO would look like after the crisis, Ms. Romero said that their permanent presence would increase, and that they would continue to focus on prevention rather than intervention. I thought that Ms. Romero’s interaction with us was extremely timely. She provided a lot of insight into not only the inner workings of NATO, but also into the current events involving the organization. Although Ms. Romero did not specifically mention creating a more perfect union, she did accentuate the theme when talking about the three key aspects of NATO. She said that NATO is not only a military organization, but a political one as well. It is a key forum for political discussions of some of the greatest national superpowers on earth. These superpowers must work together in order to attain peace and prosperity throughout not only their own countries, but the world as well. This concept is in itself creating a more perfect union between the nations of the world.

The four days of the program were long, and I will admit I was sore from sitting in the same chair all day. However, it was quite possibly the most enlightening experience of my life. No matter their political affiliation, each speaker had valuable outlooks and encouraging words of wisdom. Opening my mind to the perspective of the keynote speakers and my fellow delegates was a point I truly took to heart. Because only through collaboration and discussion with those we may not agree with can we truly reach a more perfect union.