

Jessica Ye, VA – 2022

The reality of my acceptance to the United States Senate Youth Program first set in when Washington Week ONLINE began. Months before, I received a mysterious email from the program congratulating me on my selection. After several news interviews and weeks of waiting, Washington Week was finally here. An exciting collection of speakers and activities followed.

Often, we see these public figures on TV or in the news, yet, are unable to personally interact with them. A lot of conversation surrounds their presence, from discussion of their reply to another official, to the proposed actions of the government agency they are associated with. It's hard to completely understand their personal views on different subjects, yet, with Washington Week, we were offered a glimpse at their journey to where they are now, and any advice they had.

As someone interested in international affairs, interacting with the United States Ambassador to the United Nations (UN), Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, was a highlight. I've competed in Model United Nations tournaments for years, discussing issues that Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield deals with every day. Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield's advice with navigating the world of international affairs, which included learning more about different cultures and different people, and the importance of respect, embodied her mother's advice of: "You can always be kind to those who may not be as kind to you." This statement addressing the need to be kind and respectful in the world of politics stuck with me: in a world where political polarization exists more than ever, we must stay true to our morals and be kind, no matter how hard it may be.

Similarly, the advice of Vanita Gupta, the United States Associate Attorney General was inspiring to hear. While speaking about her journey to where she is now, she emphasized the importance of open-mindedness, especially when navigating an untraditional career. As for youth interested in championing social change, Ms. Gupta advised us to have hope but also take action, in times when it is far too easy to just sit there. Ms. Gupta's unique career and insight was incredibly inspiring to hear, in a world where the youth are fighting for a seat at the table.

Looking back on Washington Week, the speakers' different advice for youth all highlighted the importance of youth involvement. Whether it be involvement in the military or the National Security Council, or involvement in the State Department, the diverse perspectives of the speakers inspired me to continue pursuing my aspirations for public service and seek to learn about new perspectives. As I continue on, I will hold the advice of Washington Week speakers dear, and continue to carefully consider decisions