

Abigail Horwitz, WI – 2022

To the future applicant, the aspiring public servant, the hopeful diplomat: Washington Week will be some of the most unforgettable days of your adolescent life. I envy my predecessors who were able to attend in person, and my successors who shall witness a return to “normal.” Regardless, the opportunities that the team who created the virtual experience provided for my fellow delegates and I were plentiful and beyond compare. For instance, I was deskbound in my bedroom in suburban Wisconsin while on the screen in front of me was Ms. Carmen Romero, NATO Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy, conversing with a group of teenagers located in every state in the United States (as well as the wonderful DoDEA delegates) from her office in Brussels. Did I mention this all happened during wartime?

What I found most stimulating about Washington Week was the multitude of different paths each speaker took to reach their role of public service. Some had attended law school, some were former military personnel, and many worked in the private sector before transitioning to government. With this newfound awareness, I was able to connect my observations with something which Senator Ron Johnson, my home state senator, said to me as we met: paraphrased loosely, he told me that some of the best politicians were those who had not been in politics all their lives. This shocked me at first, as I thought experience tended to be a premium value on political careers, however, the stories of these speakers persuaded me that Senator Johnson was right. I learned that the pursuit of excellence in any subject could be applied to excellence in politics, which became a very significant realization for me.

As our country becomes further polarized, Washington Week gave me hope for our current Congress as well as Congresses of the future. Senator Susan Collins and Senator Chris Coons spoke profoundly about the importance of bipartisanship and the steps politicians and constituents must take to relinquish the extremism that holds us back, and, in the words of Senator Collins, give urgency to the “fanatical moderate.” My fellow delegates emphasized and exhibited the same ideals. Our group chats became microcosms of the Senate, spaces where we each had enormous respect for one another and used that respect to listen to various opinions. Each delegate that I met had a genuine curiosity for the views of their peers, and when disagreement arose, polite discourse followed suit. I see this as the future of our country’s politics, and it is something that Senator Collins and Senator Coons have already begun to work toward along with a growing share of their colleagues.

From my experience, I found that the speaker who impacted me the most was Chairwoman Jessica Rosenworcel of the Federal Communications Commission. Her intellect has no boundaries, and her knowledge of the law was reinforced by her profound expertise of the problems facing our access to the internet. She advocated for rural populations and told us of her commitment to create a cellular structure that would be fairer and more accessible for all. Listening to her speak was an experience akin to reading an Asimov novel - her terminology was futuristic, yet she spoke every word with the confidence that one would only recognize in a person who knew exactly what she was talking about. As a woman interested in engineering as well as the law, Chairwoman Rosenworcel’s voice was one of the most influential pieces of Washington Week for me. She had taken the route still quite uncommon for women and serves as a trailblazer for those of us to follow her lead, including myself.

I would like to end my chronicle of Washington Week exactly as I began it, by addressing the future applicants. To all of you, know that this experience will not be perfect. You will not agree with every voice you hear. But it will be meaningful. Take as many notes as you can and enjoy the arduous days - I can promise you that the second it is over, you will yearn to return. I hope that all delegates, past, present, and future, have used Washington Week to challenge their beliefs. There will be very few times in your life where you will be able to sit with a group of your peers as passionate as yourself, and to hear from the leaders who once were once zealous teenagers like you.