

Summer Sun, CA – 2023

I write this essay overcome with the most joyous movement of my spirit. Although I had heard testimonies from past delegates describing their experience at Washington Week as “life-changing,” it wasn’t until I arrived in Washington, D.C. myself that its all-encompassing grandeur and profoundness fully washed over me. I am sure its waves will continue to reverberate through me for a lifetime.

Although every speaker imparted their own individual wisdom, two speakers immediately stand out in my mind: Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona and Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy. I am extremely passionate about elementary education and specifically expanding resources and increasing literacy rates for nonnative English speakers, so Secretary Cardona’s perspective that the solution isn’t just to solely focus on improving English, but diverting more resources to bilingual and immersion schools, was both refreshing and thought provoking.

Dr. Vivek’s Murthy speech is specifically memorable because it was a wakeup call that came at a most pertinent time in my life. I vividly remember him speaking about how he used to push his family and friends to the side in pursuit of his work, and most importantly, how he now understands the importance of personal connections with others. Something deep within me stirred when when I heard him say this, as if someone had blown the dust off of an emotion I had not touched for a long time. I was reminded that there had been times in my life where I had made Dr. Murthy’s same mistake. I have truly taken his words to heart and “pick up the phone” as Dr. Murthy said. I now view connecting myself to a support system not as a distraction, but a source of necessary energy. His words also reminded me that no matter what I do, it has always been and will always be about the people I serve.

On the last night of the program, I was lucky enough to deliver one of the two keynote speeches for this year’s class. I distinctly remember looking out from behind the podium into the clusters of faces in the crowd and feeling an emotion that can be hard to come by in today’s sometimes chaotic world: reassurance. My fellow delegates have goals much larger than themselves. While many teenagers worry about their own world, they are already thinking about how they can touch the *world*. To be truthful, they already have. They view the issues facing our nation not with grim acceptance, but a gritty and hopeful determination; the latter is vastly more difficult, which speaks to their exceptional strength and resolve. I count myself as one of the luckiest people in the world to have had the honor to spend these precious days with them.