

Carl Rifino, DE – 2023

“Success is not easy, and anything worth having is worth fighting for” - United States Senate Secretary, Sonceria Ann Berry

In our country today, there are many hardships and unfortunate events that are affecting the beautiful nation that is the United States. And, U.S. Senate Secretary Ann Berry perfectly stated how we must persist through these times. Surely, the United States has been through many rough patches of history. Yet, we have persisted and overcame these situations to more prosperous times. In times like these, cooperation instead of competition needs to be more prevalent in society than ever.

Throughout Washington Week, one of the biggest themes was the necessity for bipartisanship in our path forward as a nation. This theme, expressed by speakers and all of the other 103 delegates, was easily deemed important. However, we still see countless divisive actions and attacks against those that hold opposing viewpoints than our own. Enough is enough. Instead, we need and must participate in one of the most valuable freedoms given to American citizens - civil discourse. Through discussion, you learn why someone believes in a certain cause and how they believe we should move forward. Without this, you're only left with false presumptions - one of the most dangerous things today. Through discussion, you may also find commonality that you may have never thought to have previously existed. This is where change begins.

Warned since our nation's first president, political parties and political affiliation are tearing our communities apart, and both sides are guilty of it. For so long, we've separated ourselves based on one difference while neglecting to acknowledge 10+ similarities.

Washington Week provided a space for crucial conversations to be had. And, provided a unique opportunity for high schoolers to learn from our nation's top leaders through Q&A sessions and presentations. It's not common for one to be able to meet the U.S. Secretary of Education, U.S. Surgeon General, Director of National Intelligence, a Supreme Court Justice, among many other esteemed presenters in the span of 5 days. Combined with the opportunity to explore some of the most influential buildings in our capital, the United States Senate Youth Program is a program I could never repay for all that it has provided me with.

From 103 new best friends, to new professional contacts, to a remarkable alumni base, to invaluable Military Mentors, Washington Week broke all expectations that I had entering the week. I am eternally grateful for all that Washington Week and The Hearst Foundations made possible and will continue to make possible.