

McKenna Raade, OR – 2021

On my first day of exploring the virtual Washington Week Online portal, I could have never expected the values and ideas that would be shared by the end of the week. I was expecting my main takeaways to be about how the government functions and what each role requires of a person, despite receiving an abundance of this information, I also came away with something more. I had gained friendships, confidence, reflected on my insecurities and felt belonging with the 103 other delegates on my screen. The United States Senate Youth Program provided us with an amazing couple of days filled with opportunities and once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

Deciding my favorites between the speakers is an impossible challenge. So I'm going to share a few of the standout moments of the week. Often the speakers I was least excited about, I enjoyed the most, as I had the most to learn from them. On the first day, we were honored to speak with the wonderful Captain Scott Kelly, a former NASA Astronaut. I had no idea what to expect, but Captain Kelly's ideas on globalism, teamwork, along with his humor made for a very impactful presentation. His main topic focused on not limiting yourself and your success, as he found out very literally, the sky is not the limit. Starting off a week where we were supposed to be learning about the American government, with an Astronaut explain that the earth doesn't have borders, framed the whole week. The next day we had the once in a lifetime experience to listen and learn from a supreme court justice, Justice Clarence Thomas was a definite highlight of the week. He spoke on the importance of honesty and gave one of my favorite quotes "If you want to teach, you have to learn". It shows the importance of learning, as someone as intelligent, and well-read as him continues to feel that everyone needs to be well informed.

The second half of the week had no challenge living up to the first 2 days' success. We started off the morning with speakers from the National Institutes of Health, which included Director Dr. Francis Collins, and the trusted Dr. Anthony Fauci. America's Doctor was no letdown, in his answer to the delegate's questions. Including my own question, I was able to ask him. He spoke on the importance of working together, and when fighting a common disease or enemy, if we fight with each other, it will always win. After our virtual trip to the NIH, we stopped at CBS to speak with Ms. Norah O'Donnell. I really was not expecting her time with us to be my favorite, however, by the end of it, the moments we spent with her were at the top of my list. She spoke with such confidence, it made you scramble to write down every concept and piece of advice. Her incredible insight on reporting, and the difference between the news, and political entertainment re-framed my ideas on polarization. I'll share with you two of her thought-provoking quotes, I'm still pondering a month later. The first is a piece of advice, "The Company and who you work for, is more important than what you do" because the only thing that matters is if you're in the room. We shouldn't expect to be content with our first couple of job titles in our careers. However, working at companies that have integrity, the ability for you to demonstrate your brilliance and work ethic is all that matters in the beginning. The second quote was from her interview with Malala Yousafzai, she shared Malala's words in response to a question of if she is afraid of the Taliban that still had a bounty on her head, she said; " Why should I be afraid of someone, who's afraid of me". This is one of those quotes that makes your mind silent for a few spaces in time. As you can see, from my brief overview of only a couple of the speakers, I learned a lot.

I learned a lot about the values that lead each speaker to where they were today, and hope to use those to guide my own life. The time I spent in my Military Mentor group breakout rooms, allowed for breakdowns of the speakers, and a return to normal humanity. I really enjoyed all of my interactions with the other delegates, and hope to continue my relationships with them. The United States Senate Youth Program was a highlight of my high school career. One final piece of advice each speaker seemed to touch on, including the fellow delegates, was knowing your self-worth. Imposter Syndrome, where you feel you don't deserve your success, and you must have been just lucky to get where you are is a feeling everyone faces. You deserve everything, that brings you happiness. I plan to keep this at the front of my mind, as I hope my fellow delegates do too. So I leave you with this advice never limit yourself, be honest, try to be the most well read in the room, and know yourself worth.