

## **Matthew Blair, NH - 2022**

After nearly two years of Zoom calls, another program centered entirely online seemed, in a word, daunting. I was not sure if participants would be engaged or if the content of the week would be as impactful over Zoom. I was excited to participate and learn more about our government, but had reservations. Washington Week Online, however, broke every preconceived notion I had about what I believed it would be. The speakers were engaging, the other 103 delegates were attentive, and the virtual presentations were an immersive experience. From my desk at home in Manchester, New Hampshire I was transported to the White House, George Washington's Mount Vernon, and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

The core of this program was the impressive list of speakers. For me, our Zoom speakers were the most valuable part of the program. Not only were the speakers informative, they were inspiring and motivational. We had the opportunity to hear from speakers from all parts of government, from former Associate Justice of the United States of the Supreme Court Anthony Kennedy, to Senator Susan Collins from Maine, to Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigedge. Of particular note, we also heard from Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield, Chairman Millie from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and NATO Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy Ms. Carmen Romero, all of whom were able to provide important insight and explanation to the developing crisis in Ukraine.

Hearing from all the speakers was an eye-opening look into the worlds of politics and diplomacy. Answering questions asked directly by us, the delegates, our speakers allowed the group to explore the intricacies and complexities of government. The speakers underscored the highly flexible and adaptive ways in which our government works, the way our government must work, in order to address the needs of citizens domestically and deal with situations abroad.

After each speaker, I was left with a feeling of great hope and excitement for the future of our country. All of the speakers, in one way or another, touched on the immense importance of youth engagement in politics. From volunteering with a local mayoral campaign or possibly even interning on the Hill, the speakers made one point absolutely clear: we matter; our voices matter. As the United States continues to evolve and develop as a nation, it was emphasized that as young people we will have an instrumental role in bringing America closer to that ideal of a more perfect union.

My experience with the United Senate Youth Program and Washington Week Online was enriching, informational, and, simply, fun. While at first hesitant to spend nearly 10 hours a day on Zoom, as I reflect now I can easily say that I enjoyed every minute of it. It was an honor and privilege to be able to represent the state of New Hampshire at this prestigious program.