



Legacy Washington sponsored a contest for 6-12th grade students in Washington State in conjunction with the *Ahead of the Curve* project. Participants were asked to explore the question of who they believe is ahead of the curve in their community and why. The following essay “Women in Washington” by K. Doan was chosen as this year’s contest winner.

## **Legacy Washington**

***Ahead of the Curve*** contest winner

### ***Women in Washington*** by K. Doan

In February of 2020, I had the opportunity to come to Olympia, Washington, for the first time with the honor to serve the Washington State House of Representatives as a page.

I remember walking up to the Capitol Building on my first day at 7:26am sharp, in total awe of how absolutely beautiful the Washington State Capitol Building was. I could not close my dropped jaw—there is no way for me to explain how incredibly surreal walking up those big, looming steps felt. Those five days of working—getting the opportunity to walk the marbled and chandeliered halls of the Legislative, O’Brien, and Cherberg Buildings—felt like they were straight out of a movie. I was truly living a dream. At the time, as someone who was already so passionate about politics, I didn’t think my passion for the field could grow any stronger, but I was wrong; I had a solidified goal to pursue a future in politics and government as a politician, but physically being in Olympia only confirmed those passions.

Truly though, what inspired me the most, was getting to see the waves of women, especially women of color, in their blazers and suits confidently strutting across the house floor, the senate floor, up and down the stairs, across the halls... and everywhere else.

When I served as a page, I was one of the roughly only two Asian girls in my House paging group, swallowed by the ocean of my white male counterparts. There, I was surrounded by kids from rich families with powerful connections, who had ten times the opportunities I ever will—I was slapped in the face with our stark socioeconomic differences.

I grew up only seeing powerful, white men represented in the media as politicians, it was all I ever knew. I wondered: Would I ever see anyone that looked like me displayed in the media as a politician? Would I ever see anyone who grew up under-resourced, or under-privileged? Would I ever hear my voice represented? Could I even *be* a politician? Could I even *try* to pursue that dream, considering that I’m not and will never meet what seems to be the common politician standard of being white, rich, or *male*?

Yes. I can.

And I have 59 women representing the Washington State Legislature, and even more holding various government positions, who are proving me absolutely right today.

These women, the women of the Washington State Legislature, are giving me the representation my younger self needed to see, giving me the inspiration and motivation I never knew I needed, giving me the realization that all it ever took for me to feel like I could potentially hold a place in government was the sight of a diverse one with female faces and female voices; these women, the women in Washington's government today, *they* are ahead of the curve.

In particular, I was lucky enough to get the chance to meet with Erhiza Rivera. When I was in Olympia, I was shocked to learn that my state has never had a female treasurer. As amazing as the representation present in our state legislature is today, I was faced with a serious reality check of how truly far away the road to achieving real representation in our government is. But excitedly, Erhiza is one of the many women paving that road, serving as the assistant to the State Treasurer and hopefully soon, becoming the first female State Treasurer herself when she runs for office. As an immigrant and someone who grew up in an under-resourced community, Erhiza was shaped by the adversity she was surrounded with—not only experiencing hardship herself, but also seeing first hand the drastic effects it had on those around her, which enriched and motivated Erhiza to give back and serve her community. But more importantly, as an immigrant and someone who grew up in an under-resourced community, Erhiza is a role model—to me and to the other young girls coming to Olympia to see the faces of women of color in big offices, to see someone and something for once, outside of the status quo. After speaking to Erhiza, she advised me that if I, or other young girls hold the curiosity or passion for government, we must go and pursue it, no matter what. Because we all have unique talents and gifts. We all have something to offer—and not just *something*, we have a *lot* to offer. Us girls, we have loud and eloquent voices that we raise in the face of injustice and adversity. We are strong, smart, and passionate, and most of all, we have the potential to lead. We have the potential to *serve*.

We. Deserve. A. Seat. At. The. Table.

So to the women of Washington State who have fought for *their* seat at the table—leading the way for young girls like me—to the women of Washington State who have earned this seat and are using it as a platform to represent the voices of the unheard, to the women of Washington State who are tirelessly fighting to make not only Washington State, but the world a better place, to the women of Washington who are proving to *everyone* that women rightfully deserve to have a seat at the table, to the women of Washington who are giving the future generation of female leaders the representation and empowerment we desperately lack: on behalf of all the girls and young women of Washington State and across the nation, you are our unsung heroes and you, are ahead of the curve.

Washington State is undoubtedly ahead of the curve in many ways, but this curve? This curve that Washington is ahead of? Its women serving in government are not only ahead of it, but leading it, and soon enough a new wave of girls from my generation will too.