

Warren Chen - NH (2022)

While the description that the United States Senate Youth Program is a “unique and annual educational experience for outstanding high school students interested in pursuing careers in public service” is true, it is missing a few, subtle details. Details that I was oblivious to on that special day I learned of my selection as a delegate in the middle of, oddly enough, an in-class meditation session.

I didn't know that through this program I would, for once, wholeheartedly enjoy a Zoom call since the pandemic began. I didn't know that I'd meet the greatest group of 103 other teenagers, all of whom are destined to reach international celebrity status by age 25. I didn't know that this program would lead me to create a 40-second introduction video of my state in which I poured maple syrup onto a \$5 Hobby Lobby toy moose while nearby drivers decelerated their cars to simply comprehend what was unfolding before their eyes.

I also didn't know that this program would have the impact on me that it did. From Judges Henry and Kennedy I learned of the nuances regarding the “least dangerous” branch of the Federal Government, while Senate Historian Betty Koed left me yearning to learn more about the history of our government. Senators Chris Coons (DE), Susan Collins (ME), and Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg stressed the importance of bipartisanship and offered a new and truly authentic perspective on legislation and current events often skewed and sensationalized by the news. I was also given the privilege to write a reflection after hearing from associate attorney general Vanita Gupta, whose inspiring path motivates both myself and many other delegates on a path in civil service. Importantly, I even got to talk to charismatic Michael Kikukawa of the White House Press, who told me of a time Jill Biden scared him by jumping out of a corner in the White House. This was all accompanied by a healthy injection of C-SPAN footage.

Importantly, the plethora of speakers in the field of international relations and policy left me truly awe-inspired. From a Q&A with a NATO representative, to Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark A. Milley, to the American ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield herself, I was able to understand the need for communication and understanding in an increasingly complex and global world. In fact, the experiences and resources I was able to attain through this program have inspired me to found a Model United Nations program at my own school. This program has left such a profound impact that I am all but sure that I am to pursue a career in the field of international relations, law, and politics.

This would not be a proper essay without mention of the other delegates, all of whom are truly superstars. I stand by my claim that all 103 delegates are on the path to international fame by 25, although a few may reach it at an earlier date. Not only did I learn from the organized speakers, but I also gained a great deal from the initiative and action of the other delegates as well. In my experience, the most surprising part of an online USSYP Washington Week was how close our entire class was able to bond and know each other without ever meeting in person during the program. Ranging across a Snapchat group chat to after-hours zoom calls, this group found ways to talk. We shared many discussions and inside jokes, the most notable of which regarded the sheer number of times the Preamble was mentioned. It was quite amusing seeing faces light up as yet another speaker called upon us to assist in “pursuing a more perfect union”.

Washington Week was inspirational. From the delegates to the military mentors, the lovely photographer “President Jakub” and the climactic reveal of the USSYP tech admin at the end of the program, these were several priceless days' worth of experience which I will forever cherish in my USSYP-issued moleskine notebook, memories, and future endeavors.