

Gary Murray, DC – 2022

“Covid ruined everything,” is the statement I would say I heard the most the first beginning days of Washington Week. Leading up to the program, I had that similar feeling of wanting to have the program in person in my home city. Little did some delegates and I know that Washington Week would still live up to its potential. I was able to learn so much from all the important speakers but also all the delegates. It all started from just receiving the call that I got into the United States Senate Youth Program. I was ecstatic and even more excited to meet my fellow delegate from DC, Ra'mya Davis. We both talked and connected with each other which resonated with me knowing we were from the same area and were passionate about similar issues. Ra'mya and I talked about various things leading up to Washington Week from meeting our House Representative to questions we wanted to ask certain speakers on the agenda.

Once the Delegate Slack opened, the connections within our class rapidly began to grow. Throughout Washington Week, my class of delegates set up at least 3 social media group chats and various delegate organized zoom calls that lasted hours. These chats and calls allowed me to understand the various perspectives and opinions of different delegates. On most of our delegate-organized Zoom calls, I would hear all my peers talk about social issues like the conflict in Ukraine to the state of our nation and get the opportunity to relate to opinions. Even while virtual, the USSYP was able to get every delegate to connect with each other. The thing I appreciate the most about the USSYP is the positive atmosphere of every Zoom call. In our country's current political state, I found relief in being able to disagree with others but also be able to talk about our differing perspectives on a certain issue.

Being able to talk about social issues with high-ranking people in our government opened my eyes to multiple issues I'm passionate about and other ways to look at them. I was honored to get the opportunity to question leaders such as Judge Robert Henry and Senator Chris Coons. Speaking to these leaders allowed me to note quotes that were stated such as “Learn how to respect each other with dialogue” and “Freedom is taught. It's not born into you.” Coming into the program, the issues I was most passionate about were Social Studies standards across the nation and addressing the political division. Being able to talk to Judge Henry showed me a perspective from a judge that was able to talk about education and how the history of negroes is disproportionately taught. Each delegate picked up a different statement from each leader and shared in our chat groups. We were all so intrigued and passionate that at times I could say I felt emotion through the screen. Listening to these leaders and hearing them relate to the change that needs to be made and change that can be made is something that will stick with me for a lifetime.

Lastly, the times with our military mentor groups is something that will always be in my heart specifically. My military mentor, LCDR Alex Miller, led each call with diligence and understanding. There were times when the group would be in a deep discussion on a certain issue and LCDR Miller would find a way to really bring the thoughts out of everyone. The group was never uninteresting, and I learned from various delegates in my group as well. I'm very fortunate to have gotten the opportunity to work with such intelligent and distinct individuals and wish it could've been longer. I look forward to working with the USSYP Alumni Association and further working with my fellow delegates. Being apart of the 60th Class is an honor.