

## **Rachel Gurevich, NJ – 2022**

Participating in Washington Week in an online setting initially prompted disappointing reminders of the tumultuous events of the past few years, many of which I experienced from the same room I occupied during Washington Week. Yet it was during our abnormal online program – both through conversations with speakers and with fellow delegates – that I began to appreciate the irregular nature of my Washington Week experience, as well as the strength of our union, which survived the same odd circumstances as the Senate Youth delegates.

The theme of perfecting our Union was prevalent throughout Senate Youth. During remarks from Judge Robert H. Henry, he acknowledged the difficulties our class has experienced, as well how our nation's calamities have eroded democratic norms. He provided thought-provoking comments on the importance of our Constitution's preamble -- its assertions of justice, domestic tranquility, general welfare, and liberty -- and how these values reign true during such uncertain times. This idea was bolstered by the breadth of knowledge of the following speaker, Senate Historian Betty Koed, who shared engaging stories of changemakers whose individual advocacy propelled change. I know her accounts will inspire my future work in public service, motivating me to improve our Union regardless of how others respond. Additionally, hearing from members of the foreign service -- a career field I aspire to work in -- contributed to my understanding of the importance of democracy. As NATO Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy Carmen Romero unpacked the role of NATO and how its mission of protecting peace have informed its decisions in Ukraine improved my understanding of the both the war and how diplomacy function. Later, hearing Ambassador Linda Thomas Greenfield discuss her suggestions for contributing to successful diplomacy further codified my aspirations for working in the foreign service.

Most influential to my experience was Justice Anthony Kennedy. At school, I participate in a class called Institute for Political and Legal Education, during which we acquire a deep understanding of constitutional law. This background made me extremely excited for Justice Kennedy's remarks, as I anticipated posing a question pertaining to my class. However, early into his remarks, Justice Kennedy challenged delegates with his questions, specifically asking we identify what makes our Constitution unique compared to other countries' founding documents. Heart pounding, I raised my hand, and to my surprise, I was called on. After correctly identifying separation of powers, I was complimented by Justice Kennedy, but was then quickly caught with a follow-up question. Despite my anxiety, staring face to face with a Supreme Court Justice, I was able to respond, informing him and my peers that separation of powers is also often referred to as checks and balances. Rather than asking Justice Kennedy my own question, I was able to test my knowledge of the Constitution in the most influential setting: before a Supreme Court Justice. I can truly say I'll remember that moment for the rest of my life.

Despite the unique nature of Washington Week online, this experience will undoubtedly stick with me. Speaking with my fellow delegates in my military mentor group, I was given hope for the ability of my generation to alter partisan divides and engage in thoughtful conversation about complex issues. As I move forward following Washington Week, I know I will continue to perfect our Union, using my education from the Senate Youth program to help me do so.