

## **Griffin Taylor, RI - 2022**

After spending almost two years of my high school life sitting behind a computer screen, I was fully confident that I would never willingly join a Zoom call again in my life. I gladly reflect on this thought now and realize just how wrong this presumption was. Every morning from March 6th to the 9th, I set my alarm early and began the countdown until I could hit the “Join Meeting Now” link. Every day I waited to hear the trademark opening statements, and every day I looked forward to meeting all one-hundred and three other accomplished delegates such as myself. Even after the program concluded, joining delegate online calls would be the highlight of my night. Although years ago this may have been something ridiculous to say, I can firmly state that through those four days I made countless memories and relationships that I hope to treasure for the rest of my life. All through a computer screen.

Not only will I remember the memories made, but I feel as if the program itself changed my way of thinking. Attending the United States Senate Youth Program helped me establish an open mindset, which I believe to be a powerful tool when working in any sort of political sector. Speakers and Senators such as Chris Coons of Delaware and Susan Collins of Maine constantly emphasized the ideology of bipartisanship, as it proves to be an important aspect in our country's future leaders, many of which I sat with inside Zoom calls. Washington Week also sparked a renowned sense of patriotism in my heart, as it was inspiring to see international leaders tending to real-world problems as representatives of America. Whether it was General Mark A. Milley or Linda Thomas-Greenfield, each speaker stressed the importance of following our roles as active citizens, a position just as important as any government official. Without the people, there is no democracy.

Overall, the United States Senate Youth Program was a remarkable experience I will surely never forget. Thank you to the Hearst Foundations for putting together such a spectacular program, especially considering all of the potential setbacks the foundation faced. It was truly a special time for me every second I spent on the call with not only national leaders but Rhode Island's very own state-level leaders as well. Who knew that both Rhode Island Senators have played squash before? Both figuratively and literally, I could not have felt more at home with the welcomeness and enthusiasm of both our military mentors and foundation members. In the near future, I will definitely look forward to contributing as an alumnus of this special program. In conclusion, as Major Cox said it best, “Thank you delegates and distinguished guests, and have a good night!”