

## Ella Morel, NY – 2026

*“Good evening delegates and distinguished guests.”* These are the words that JB recited on the daily, before each of his speeches. We got so accustomed to it that my fellow delegates and I saw it as a joke. When some of my peers were running for the farewell speech, many used this introduction as an endearing form of amusement. After Washington week, I came to realize that it was much more than a greeting. It was a promise. A promise that over the course of this week, we would change. We were chosen as delegates because we were destined to become distinguished guests. I believe that Washington week helped form us into these distinguished guests, one being the title “alumni.” The story and memories that contribute to these metamorphoses are complex, youthful, and most of all impactful.

On the first day we discussed political polarization. Being from downstate New York I had grown up witnessing this divide. Implicitly judging people based on their political affiliation had been instilled in me at a very young age. On this day, I took the microphone and stated that I would lead this week with a clear, judgement-free mind; and that is what I did. When speaking to delegates from states such as Kentucky and Utah I was able to become close with the representatives. I am sure that if we spoke politically there would be some disagreements. Nonetheless, we became friends. We did not let our political beliefs shadow who we were as individuals. We welcomed each conversation with curiosity rather than assumption. Leading with the mindset of understanding the person before the party, allowed us all to get to know each other on a much more personal level. It also allows you to understand where their arguments stem from.

Another piece of the United States Senate Youth Program that I will never underestimate or forget is the power of our navy blue notebooks. On the first day we received them, blank, without the black ink of our thoughts. Throughout the week each of its crisp off-white pages became filled with notes. Some filled its pages with questions we debated asking on the bus. Others, similarly to me, filled them with notes of each and every speaker. We wrote because we feared that we would forget. I wrote notes so that I could always be transported back into the world of a delegate during Washington Week.

At the end of each of my favorite speeches I would write a page, identifying all of my surroundings. From the delegate next to me, to the architectural details of the room, to what our speakers were wearing, I would write down all of my observations, in the hope that I would never be able to forget that moment. On March ninth I wrote, “I saw the possibility of my further, this is my time. I am surrounded by such influential leaders of my generation and it's terrifying, but in the best way.” On this day we met Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson. She was everything and more of what you could imagine the first Black woman on the Supreme Court would be like. She was kind, funny, and relatable. After our discussion with her, my future seemed to become clear. I immediately thought to myself, “I want to be a judge.”

The United States Senate Youth Program not only provides you with an experience of a lifetime. It also provides you with a network of thousands who are always there to help you through your future endeavors of life. For example, one of the New York alumni from the class of 2024 gave me a personal tour of Stanford, which is my dream school. Additionally, what many do not speak of in the perspective of being a Junior during Washington Week. I left this week with Military Mentors, mentors and role models from my own class, as well as a network of alumni who are always eager to help. I hope to give back to the Senate Youth Program by offering the same guidance and mentorship to future delegates, regarding college and potential careers, just as I have already received.