

## **Sathvik Nori, CA – 2021**

I am so grateful for the opportunity I had to take part in the 59th Annual United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP). Not only did I meet so many like-minded and civically engaged youth, but I gained insight into the workings of our government that cemented my goal of a future career in public service. When I first received a phone call from the Hearst Foundations telling me of my selection as one of two delegates from California, I was completely shocked. Immediately though, I felt a tinge of disappointment knowing that the program would not be in-person and I would not get to see the speakers or my fellow delegates. Thankfully from the first day of “online” Washington Week, the Hearst Foundations put together such a solid program that was so immersive I felt like I was with my fellow delegates the whole time.

Even before the program, making the “Roll Call of the States” video with the other California delegate, allowed us to explore our creative side and showcase California, the best state in the union! I also had a chance to meet other delegates across the country on social media platforms such as Instagram and Discord. Even though a lot of us came from different backgrounds and had different political beliefs, we were able to engage in productive dialogue that furthered the idea of an informed citizenry that our founding fathers valued so greatly in this democracy.

This feeling of camaraderie was only amplified the first time I met our Military Mentor group. Captain Tony Starks was by far the best mentor ever! The military is often stereotyped as being a gruff institution without much care for people’s feelings, but nothing could be further from the truth. From the beginning, Captain Starks demonstrated his deep commitment to our wellbeing and care for our success. The discussions we had about topics such as religion in politics could sometimes get intense, but Captain Starks always ensured they stayed civil and respectful. He also made clear to us that he was here to help even after the program was over and that we should not hesitate to contact him if we ever needed anything. We are already planning a reunion in Washington, DC next year!

Like everything else about the Senate Youth Program, Washington Week itself was a blast and my only complaint was that it was too short! The wide variety of speakers meant that almost everyone could find something they were interested in. It was very cool to see so many famous politicians outside of the traditional public spotlight and have them interact with us like we were their friends. It was especially great to see Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas talk. I have always been inspired by his story of rising up from poverty and it was amazing to hear him speak about the functioning and operation of the American judiciary system. I was especially overjoyed that I had an opportunity to ask him a question about his thoughts on freedom of the press in public schools. His response was informative and inquisitive and I will never forget when he chuckled reminiscing on his own days as a high school journalist.

Ultimately, USSYP instilled me with a deep respect for the public servants who dedicate their career to the effective governance of the United States. I hope to follow in the footsteps of leaders like Dr. Anthony Fauci, Captain Scott Kelly, Norah O’Donnell, Justice Clarence Thomas, and many others in making a long-lasting impact on our great country.