

## Jack Perenick, MA – 2021

In the summer of 2019, I was a curious high school junior with a love of politics, scouring the internet for every piece of information I could find about the U.S. Senate. Eventually, I stumbled upon the biographies of some of the Senate staff who I found did not speak publicly often, with one exception, many of them spoke annually to something called the United States Senate Youth Program. Right then, I decided that whatever that was, it was something I wanted to be a part of. I now know the USSYP is a collection of 103 of the most amazing people I have ever met, who spent a week together learning about the world's greatest deliberative body. A few days after I got the call telling me I would be joining the program, I had the opportunity to meet several other delegates from across the country on a group call. I was awestruck by the people who greeted me, young people from around the country who had taken it upon themselves to be leaders who contributed every fiber of their being to improving their surroundings and strengthening their communities.

After that first night, I was overwhelmed by how much passion and positivity the delegates could assemble in one place, and I knew I wanted to hear more from more of the 103 new friends I had waiting for me across the country. What might have been the best part of taking part in Washington Week virtually was that our ability to meet as delegates was not constrained by the walls of a hotel or the timetable of a plane ticket. I wanted to take advantage of a year where the confines of the internet were all that kept us apart, and after about four weeks, I had met with every delegate in the program and talked to them about who they are and why they were a part of USSYP. After interviewing and writing features of all 104 delegates, I felt like I had connected with a community of scholars, community organizers, and future government leaders, which I feel lucky to have been able to learn from.

A typical week for me involves no less than four hours of C-SPAN. Over the last few years, I have inevitably watched every Senator speak, vote, and stroll on the floor. The program allowed me to step inside the television when they connected me and my co-delegate Miriam with our U.S. Senator, Ed Markey. When I got home from school, I turned the Senate Floor Webcast as I do on many days, but unlike usual, I knew exactly where Senator Markey would be going after casting his floor vote on the nomination before the Senate. Just moments after casting his vote, the Senator called Miriam and me from just off the Senate floor to let us know he was running to his office to meet with us. It was incredible to discuss current events with my home state senator and ask him questions about how his work had changed in the narrowly divided chamber. As someone interested in serving in representative government, having the opportunity to speak with someone who had served in both houses of Congress was invaluable. Meeting Senator Markey and his team of dedicated staff who had worked to advance legislation for the Commonwealth and the country writ large gave me great admiration for the role that public officials play in strengthening our nation. Each minute my co-delegate and I had to talk with Senator Markey was incredible; and while I am sure we both felt a little guilty for holding him late, it was only more surreal to just moments later see him apologizing to Senator Murphy on C-SPAN for being late to take over as the presiding officer in the Senate.

I will be ever grateful to the United States Senate and the Hearst Foundations for extraordinary experiences I had during Washington week—from giving remarks to Gina McCarthy, to discussing critical issues for my generation with my fellow delegates and Military Mentor Major McClain, and even hearing from former Senator, and now President Joe Biden. This program has fueled my faith that America's future is bright. I leave this program even more optimistic about the spirit of hope and the conviction of character that my generation will bring to American politics in the decades to come. From Jack in the Bay State, thank you USSYP!