

## Jacob Lesick, OH - 2021

### USSYP 2021: The Year of Perseverance

It's fair to say, setting plays a huge and vital role in the influence of how one takes in an experience, especially with programs like this. COVID-19 has no doubt put an abrupt halt to all traditional and conventional ways of doing things, whether it be something small that is done day-to-day or something as large as the well renowned and thrilling Washington Week. As someone who had been thinking about this since my eighth grade year when another individual from my school was chosen to represent the state of Ohio at this program, I built up a lot of expectations. From hearing the stories of what goes on during that exciting week in Washington, to reading the materials provided on the website, I had a pretty solid idea of what originally seemed to be an extremely distant dream before I was made an official delegate of what would go down during this program. Until we were hit by a pandemic that unfortunately continues to ravage the world. The word of the year—"Zoom"—had finally reached even the most prestigious programs and organizations such as this. I was so upset and devastated, worrying that I wouldn't get the same experience as most of the other delegates every other year did.

Never in my life could I have been so wrong.

No doubt, as soon as I got that first email, I was overwhelmed with feelings of joy, pride, and so much honor. This was something I had only previously dreamed of, and now I made it to this landmark, even though I had no idea what to expect given the circumstances. Pandemics have the great power to ravage tradition, but we—the student delegates and the phenomenal staff who contributed to this truly exceptional program—showed society that pandemics also have the ability to empower people to overcome and persevere. As a result, I can guarantee that Washington Week will go down as one of the most memorable weeks in my life.

The knowledge, intellect, and wisdom that each and every one of the speakers had to offer to us was truly outstanding. I will admit, some of the individuals on the speaker list I've never heard of. Because of this, I didn't expect much from them, and I didn't think I would learn much from them. Again, a place where I was so very much in the wrong. While it was my first time ever hearing of individuals such as Judge Robert H. Henry, or Dr. Betty Koed, or even Mr. Brian Kamoie, these individuals provided so much insight that I absolutely know I will carry with me for the rest of my one wild and precious life, as Mr. Kamoie would say. Before this program, I never thought of society as mixed up in the sense that we have paleolithic behaviors, surrounded by medieval institutions, equipped with god-like technology, as said by Judge Henry. Before this program—while I would never condone it—I didn't have as much of an in-depth understanding of how truly irritating misinformation is in our world as described by Dr. Koed. I had such a tremendous pleasure listening to the great information these wonderful people had to share.

I would be missing out on an opportunity to truly express the great amount of thrill there was to being in the same Zoom room as an Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court. While I may hold differing views from Justice Clarence Thomas, it was still a thrill to hear from an Associate Justice from the highest court in the land. And of course, listening to America's Dr. Fauci was most certainly an exciting experience. Especially during the time of this pandemic, Dr. Fauci was (and absolutely still is) an individual that I was so excited to hear from during this program, and he had much to offer intellectually in regards to keeping an open-mind in our futures as well as going into something we truly enjoy. And I cannot forget to mention Ms. Norah O'Donnell. Hearing her speak, zooming in

from the CBS Newsroom was such a great experience. Her ability to simply give off small, yet powerful pieces of advice was something so very inspirational and thrilling, something that will ring with me for a long time! To sum it up, it truly was an outstanding honor to be able to hear from all of these speakers. And it certainly was a huge exciting surprise to listen to the recorded video from President Joe Biden who unfortunately couldn't join us via zoom on that day.

I would be absolutely remiss if I didn't mention our extravagant Military Mentors, and especially my own Military Mentor, Captain Molly Baker. The debriefing conversations that we had the pleasure of engaging in truly contributed to the feel of the week and continued to help develop and strengthen our relationships with each other. These people are great and were truly outstanding mentors to help guide us through Washington Week. I would also be remiss if I didn't mention my fellow delegates, which I absolutely am honored to know. These people are so absolutely outstanding and extravagant, and it's incredible how something with the purpose of being four days long really develops something that will last a lifetime.

To conclude, I want to ensure that my thanks are extended to the staff who contributed to developing a program in the most unique of circumstances. Your efforts have most certainly paid off and will stick with us for the rest of our lives. I also want to ensure that I look back to my roots and thank everyone from my hometown of Perrysburg, my school, Rossford High School, and everyone in the Toledo area who helped me in building the foundation that would build myself up all the way to this point, and beyond! There is no doubt, without you guys, I would certainly not have made it as far as I currently am. I'm certainly honored to have started out here. Again, thank you for this truly rememberable experience. It's something I will never ever forget and will hold close to me for the rest of my life.