

## **Eman Seyal, CT – 2022**

*“Eman: Please call me at your earliest convenience.”* They say there are some memories you will never be able to forget. You won’t forget where you are sitting, what was happening around you, how you were feeling, and more. My journey from first learning about the United States Senate Youth Program all the way to receiving the news of my acceptance and then participating in the immensely inspirational and transformative program during Washington Week was undoubtedly one of those vivid stories for me that I will never be able to forget.

It was quite late at night and I had been working on completing my Calculus homework when I suddenly heard my phone beep beside me, the notification displaying an email from my school’s Rho Kappa adviser. As my eyes scanned the text, I became more and more elated to learn that my teacher was recommending for me to apply to the United States Senate Youth Program. Some months after submitting my application to the Connecticut State Department of Education, I was called down to my teacher’s room in the middle of the school day. In all honesty, I was expecting the conversation to be regarding my position as President of Rho Kappa, and certainly was not expecting any news regarding the U.S. Senate Youth Program. However, when my fellow schoolmate, Neya Kidambi, and I both received a huge hug from my teacher, I was absolutely shocked and thrilled to learn that Neya and I had been selected as two of the top ten potential delegates in the state and were advancing to the second round; the first time both delegates from Trumbull High School had advanced together to the second round.

After sharing the news with my parents, I quickly worked on preparing for my panelist interview to take place early the following week. I learned everything I possibly could regarding my state Senators and the country’s current healthcare system—my true passion in government, solidified the reasons behind my deep desire to participate in the program, and so much more. Two days after answering several thought-provoking and significant questions in the panelist interview, on the ride home from school, I saw that I had a missed phone call, voicemail, and email from Mr. Stephen Armstrong, the Connecticut Board of Education’s Social Studies Consultant, asking me to call him at my earliest convenience. I vividly remember as I read the email out loud to my parents in the car and then rushed inside and up the stairs once we got home—my heart pounding—as I quickly said a prayer and called back Mr. Armstrong in my room. It was a challenge not to burst into tears when Mr. Armstrong told me about how well I spoke in the interview, and that the DOE had selected me as one of the delegates from the state of Connecticut. I remember as I thanked him so sincerely before running back downstairs and screaming at the top of my lungs to my parents downstairs that I had been selected! It was such an honor and a blessing for me.

Apparently, however, I was the only one not told that both Trumbull High students had been selected, as Mr. Armstrong wanted to keep it a surprise for me, and what a beautiful and thrilling surprise it was upon going back to school on Monday to get my picture taken by my Rho Kappa adviser that I had found out Neya and I were both co-delegates. I am so thankful to Mr. Armstrong, the panelist interviewees, the Connecticut DOE, and my adviser for introducing me to the program, selecting me, and supporting me throughout the way. In my USSYP experience, this is a story I will truly never be able to forget.

As March came closer and closer, I was so fortunate to not only have spoken with Senator Murphy and Senator Blumenthal, discussing our shared youth experiences and common passions, but also to have met such incredible fellow delegates across the United States who continue to inspire me each day. I developed one of the strongest support systems I ever had, even if it was only virtually over social media! We slowly began counting down the days until Washington Week, and when the week finally came, seeing and hearing all of the delegates over Zoom was a different experience entirely, and it brought us all so much closer together. It was as though everyone's high-spirited energy was contagious. I saw how each and every one of them were so eager to learn from all of the different speakers presenting to us. I saw how each and every one of them had a smile across their face from ear to ear in excitement as we all soaked up as much information as possible, learning how we all would one day be leaders together in shaping our nation and forming a more perfect union, in performing one of the most important tasks in the country that is upholding democracy and serving the people.

This was the common theme that we heard from every speaker—that *we the people* collectively have the remarkable responsibility of making every town, every city, every state, every nook and cranny of this country, and even this world a better place, for everyone deserves an equal American dream, for this is what our Founding Fathers sought after, for this is the very intentions that the framers of the Constitution implemented upon writing perhaps the most treasured and influential document in mankind's history, for "we" are "the people United States" and "we" "establish this Constitution for the United States of America." Hearing the purposes and duties laid out in the preamble by Judge Robert Henry, and later by Justice Anthony Kennedy, was perhaps one of the most inspiring moments for me throughout the week. In Justice Kennedy's words, "The framers understood that they were not perfect..." but "a nation of tomorrow could be more perfect than today." Even more importantly, however, was Justice Kennedy's explanation of what we can and need to do as *the people* of the United States, as *the people* who ultimately hold the power to shape, change, and transform this country: "It's time for Americans to wake up to what the framers had intended... We need a constitutional consciousness. The Constitution is ours—and we must transmit it to the next generation in which it is respected, valued, revered, and where it protects freedoms." This is the America that I will always fight for, the America that I wish to give forward to future generations, one of equality, peace, democracy, and freedom, one of respect, resilience, bravery, and faith.

From presenting my poem on the open mic night to receiving a small but extremely significant White House tour from Mr. Kikukawa, from attempting to solve the Suez Canal crisis to hearing about the work of NATO, from asking former Senator Gardner about his monumental mental health national hotline to asking Senator Coons' opinion on how the healthcare system can help turn around the opioid epidemic, from listening to White House Climate advisor Ali Zaidi speak about the importance of environmental policy on healthcare to General Milley describing further both international history and our country's constitutional principles, there are so many moments I will hold onto forever from Washington Week 2022. Every time I raise my hand to my heart and say the words of the pledge of allegiance, every time pride and passion pulls at my heartstrings to remind me of my privilege of being an American, I will always think of those who fought and keep fighting to make our nation what is, to make freedom and liberty ring from every corner just for the sake of the people, for the sake of the red, white, and blue; and just as former Senator Gardner taught us, I will never give up faith in America, for democracy shall always prevail so long as we muster the courage to become that very light shining "beside the golden door."