

## Allison McVey, PA – 2022

The USSYP Washington Week Online 2022 experience will be something that I will undoubtedly carry with me as I embark on my college career and beyond. The morning of our first day of programming, I distinctly remember getting ready, preparing my Washington Week headquarters with my computer, USSYP tumbler, and, perhaps most importantly, my USSYP notebook. As I leaf through that notebook now, the sheer volume of insight and knowledge shared by so many speakers during Washington Week is almost overwhelming. The 100 pages that I covered with blue ink over those four days tell an incredible story; they chronicle the presentation from Senator Cory Gardner of Colorado, and his experiences as a young changemaker and advocate.

I remember plucking up the courage to ask Senator Gardner a question after his speech, and feverishly rewriting it over and over in my notebook to make sure it was fit for a former U.S. Senator. My heart pounded as Major Cox called on me to speak to the Senator, and as I began to ask my question, I was utterly amazed to see Senator Gardner break out into a wide grin and offer a friendly laugh. Out of amusement and relief, I began to laugh as well, and Jakub Mosur was able to capture this unlikely moment of the Senator and I, laughing together. If someone had shown me that image prior to Washington Week, I would have thought it impossible. But this moment really set the tone for my Washington Week experience - though we were spoken to by Senators, a Supreme Court Justice, federal judges, and a plethora of other highly distinguished government officials, they were all truly real people, whose genuine desire to see us young leaders succeed was palpable, even over Zoom.

A few pages further into my USSYP notebook tells of Justice Anthony Kennedy's address to the delegates - what stood out to me most about the Justice was his deeply reflective nature. Even when addressing a Zoom room full of high school juniors and seniors, Justice Kennedy chose his words with the thought and care one might expect him to use when authoring a majority opinion. And, in a surprising twist, the Justice began asking questions of the delegates, mostly pertaining to the provisions of the U.S. Constitution. To engage in such active dialogue with a man of Justice Kennedy's expertise is, I believe, a truly once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and one I think is only afforded by the USSYP.

Deeper into my notebook are extensive notes about the Suez Canal crisis, taken as I prepared for the Interactive Diplomacy Simulation presented to us by the U.S. Department of State. I and my fellow delegates were tasked with resolving the Suez Canal Crisis of 1956 and were each assigned to represent a different implicated nation. I was struck by the knowledge and negotiating skills of all of the delegates - it was abundantly clear that we all had pored over the information we had been provided about the crisis, which, I think, is a testament to the eagerness with which everyone approached Washington Week. Each and every delegate was wholly determined to get as much out of the experience as possible, which was to the benefit of all of the delegates as a group. Even when debate became heated between Great Britain and Egypt, the camaraderie between the delegates was upheld - I do feel that we were unified by the Washington Week experience, even in a virtual setting.

Finally, my notebook ends with notes from Secretary Pete Buttigieg's closing address. When the secretary told us of his personal experience as a USSYP alum, and the pride that he felt to take part in the program, I was able to internalize exactly what this program can do. It serves not only to educate about governmental affairs, but to inspire and uplift hopeful young leaders like myself and my co-delegates - to inhabit the same figurative seat of some of the nation's most influential officials truly makes you feel as though you can do anything. And, after getting to know the delegates around me, I think that fact will hold true for us all.