

Where Are They Now?

A Look at Exceptional
Model Arab League Alumni



Jack Patrick Lewis **State Representative, Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

Could you start with a quick rundown of the path you took after college?

I graduated from the University of Utah in May 2003, with BAs in Political Science (Honors), Middle East Studies- Arabic, and International Studies. While throughout most of college I had wanted to pursue employment in the US State Department, life took a few turns in college that led me to Eden Theological Seminary outside of Saint Louis, MO. While pursuing my Master of Divinity, I had the opportunity to serve several faith communities, work with people recently released from prison, and study and intern abroad I graduated from Eden in 2010 and took a position as the Assistant Minister for Social Justice and Religious Education at the Unitarian Universalist Society of Wellesley Hills. In that position I helped found OUT MetroWest, a regional support program for LGBTQ middle and high school youth, and soon left my employment at the church to serve as the new organization's executive director. At the end of 2015, our former state representative announced he was not running for re-election, and I soon announced my own candidacy. I was first elected in 2016 and then again in 2018.

What are some habits that led to your successful education and career?

I will always be grateful for everyone who has supported me through school and my career. I am very fortunate to have a very supportive family and group of friends.

Personally, I have always challenged myself to be organized, flexible, and diverse in my interests. While there may not seem to be a logical connection between the three, managing tasks in an organized fashion, being willing to move with life's highs and lows, and never allowing my passions to be narrowed down to a single path have led me on a fun journey that has led to a position that I previously dismissed as pure fantasy.

How did your time abroad in Egypt and Ghana help you grow on a personal level?

My studies at the University of Utah instilled in me a great passion for traveling. I have been very

fortunate to study abroad in Morocco, Egypt, and India, volunteer in Ghana and New Zealand, lead service-learning trips to Nicaragua, Guatemala, Romania, and Hungary, and personally travel to more than 30 other nations. For me, experiencing another's culture, being welcomed into their homes and places of worship, and eating around a shared table, is a key to maintaining both a personal and global focus in all that I do. While we may be residents of our communities and citizen of one country or another, seeing oneself as a global citizen is the highest value I hold.

Graduating college can be disorientating for many students, how did you find direction after leaving college life?

I recommend that students pursue all the opportunities that college provides, including extracurricular activities and internships. Not only do these pursuits provide avenues for students to explore interest in possible career paths, they can also lead to possible post-college careers. As much as one's academic schedule allows, I urge students to make time in their final semester to seriously invest in researching possible positions and applying. If your experience is like many students, and a job doesn't materialize immediately after graduation, consider extended internships or further education. Also, make sure you maintain relationships with mentors and favorite professors, because those connections may continue to be very important.

With such varied experiences, why did you decide to run for the Massachusetts House of Representatives?

I have always had a great interest in the political process, and while I have been involved in campaigns since high school, the possibility of running myself was something only of fantasies. When our former state representative though announced he was not running for re-election, I began having conversations with people in the community that I had worked closely with before (teachers, therapists, counselors...) and we concluded that there was a place for someone in the race advocating for our shared values. Immediately it became clear to me that the same social, economic, and racial justice issues that were an important part of my education and my work in non-profit and religious organizations could be the backbone of my campaign, and ultimately in my work in the Massachusetts House of Representatives.

How did you most want to improve your district when you decided to run for election?

We formally adopted our first son a year before I ran for state representative. While I had long worked with other people's children in various roles, for me there was nothing like becoming a dad to force me to confront the reality that children only have one childhood, and that the decisions made today by adults will affect them their entire lives. Wanting to make sure that my kids and their classmates have all the resources necessary to not only survive but thrive in their lives became the driving force of my campaign. Ensuring that justice and equity are the cornerstone of all that we do as a legislature is why I first ran and what gets me out of bed each morning.

You attended two Model Arab League Conferences in 2006 and won awards on the regional and national level. What are some of the memories you have from those conferences?

Model Arab League was the backbone of my undergraduate program. I participated in regional and national competitions all four years of college. One of main reasons I didn't graduate early nor study abroad during the academic year was my commitment to participating in Model Arab League for as many years as I could. I was honored to lead our local group and to earn several awards over the years. I now visit Washington, DC a few times a year for conferences and make a point of walking by the hotel where our competitions took place in order to keep the memories alive. For many of the years I served on the Council of Arab Environmental Affairs and have fond memories of lengthy discussions on dugongs and Arabian gazelles.

How did your experience with Model Arab League help you caucus in the Massachusetts legislature?

Model Arab League was the first and only formal training I had in debate prior to being elected. The skills of needing to advocate for one's own community and values while working towards consensus with diverse partners was something I did first as part of the program. While the issues I now focus on in the state legislature are less global than they were in Model Arab League, similar discussions on social, economic, and environmental justice continue.

I also represent a very diverse district, with families from all over the planet. My experience with Model Arab League has been vital in working in this diverse community, in a job that calls on me to support local Syrian refugees, assist constituents seeking legal immigration status, and advocate for additional funding for statewide adult English as a second language programs.

How did Model Arab League benefit you academically and professionally?

Model Arab League provided me opportunities to learn about international relations, explore regional and global issues, and develop and hone debate skills. I cannot imagine college without the framework that Model Arab League provided, and would not be where I am today without it.

What was an influential topic or issue that you studied and debated while you were in Model Arab League?

Serving on the Council of Arab Environmental Affairs provided me opportunities to better understand global environmental issues, something that regularly influences my job as an elected official today.

Are there any friends or connections you made while in Model Arab League who you still have contact with today?

I continue to be friends with several former Model Arab League participants and am looking for ways to support future participants in the program.

Do you have any last advice for students who are trying to decide their future careers after college?

My main advice for students is to cast their professional nets wide and be willing to explore all of the opportunities life throw their way. For much of college I was very focused on the idea of employment with the US State Department, but life has taken me in radically different directions, and I am grateful for it.