

## Hannah Zimmerman, NY – 2017

I will admit freely that United State Senate Youth Program was not the best week of my life, but it was the week that changed my life. There is not a lot of diversity of thought where I come from. My county is the bluest county in America, one in which Jill Stein received more votes than Donald Trump. I openly identify as socialist, as do all of my friends. There are merely four Republicans at my school.

As such, I have grown accustomed to my political views and those of my friends. At the United States Senate Youth Program, I was unaware that I would be the most left-wing person in the room, and that I would be the only socialist many of these delegates had ever met. While many of the delegates initially dismissed my ideas, many listened and many cared to learn more about why I think the way I do. While I admit, being called a “crazy communist” is never fun, to see the letters in my journal commending my bravery or fearlessness made my heart happy. Perhaps my favorite letter was that of one of the delegates from Texas, Amina, in which she wrote “Muslims everywhere and myself thank you for your courage,” upon my asking of the national director of National Counterterrorism Center the merits of a Muslim ban.

Nevertheless, by about day three of the program, I was beginning to doubt my political beliefs. The constant berating questions, and insults about my “Stalin-loving” without anyone else openly at my degree on the political spectrum to keep me company became scary. However, then came the most important speaker for me, the executive director of the Society of Cincinnati, Jack Warren. He spoke to us about the story of the founding fathers of this country. He spoke about how they had a dream for American independence before the majority of colonists wanted to leave Great Britain. They were “spit-on,” downtrodden, and told their plans would fail. Nevertheless, they stood up for what they believed in and led this country to independence. This resonated deeply with me. Just because my opinion was unpopular in the program does not mean it is wrong. If I can learn anything from our Founding Fathers, do not give up on your beliefs because people will initially push back. Many people will even join you.

By the end of the week, two of my fellow delegates had joined the socialist organization I am on the national board of, and five people told me they identified as socialist. I began to see through the eyes of my political heroes, Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders, the two most left wing senators in the country. They can hold their own, both politely and diligently in a room full of people with dissenting opinions and garner respect. I know that I will have meaningful personal and professional relationships with many of the delegates for years to come. Others I may never speak to again, but I will be thankful for each lesson they taught me, and how I can learn from them as I continue down my political path. To close, through this week I learned that each delegate loves this country equally. However, we all love this country, and show our love for this country in a different way.