

Emily Jenie Maluyo, HI – 2019

After an amazing week hearing from dignitaries, diplomats, and the highest-elected officials in the nation, I have a whole new perspective of how great the United States of America actually is and the bright future that is ahead of us. Though many people have the preconception that today's political culture is corrupt and ignorant, Washington Week has proven to me that there are unity and diversity amongst my generation.

An event that resonates with me the most is meeting my senators, Mazie Hirono, and Brian Schatz, at the annual United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) Senate Reception. I have never had the opportunity to meet my elected official before, so being able to have a thoughtful conversation and be in their presence was such an amazing experience. Despite the persona they gained from current news, I discovered that they genuinely cared for the future of our democracy and noticed the strong passion they have towards representing Hawaii. It boosted my motivation to bring more representation of Hawaii in politics. I want to use my voice to echo the feelings of Hawaii and make it known that we are all here -- all of our struggles, our efforts, and our passions, are not absent from places where we are not seen.

Prior to being selected as a USSYP delegate, I had self-committed myself to becoming a health professional. When I thought of serving my community, I would always think of doctors or nurses. As I actually experienced Washington Week, I developed a stronger passion for public service and found a new definition of serving the community. This was not a barrier for me to find a new career, but it propelled me to integrate myself into politics as a health professional. It was the memorable experiences I had that helped me to develop a clearer vision for my future. I want to be the leader that my community needs to face the bigger issues that can't be solved right now: medically and politically.

Being from Hawaii, I felt that I would be drowned from the outspoken delegates as I first entered the Mayflower Hotel. I was afraid that my voice wouldn't be heard and pushed aside. But in reality, I created friendships that I can't find anywhere else. Being surrounded by 103 delegates who have the same passion of becoming a leader of our nation felt amazing and inspiring. Although we are around the same age, I envied everyone around me as they are already doing significant things for our country. Whether it's being a president of a club or inventing an innovative product, I saw the bright future that was ahead of them. My co-delegates and I are definitely keeping in touch as we embark in our journey to become the leaders of our nation.

The memories I have created through the United States Senate Youth Program are something that will forever be integrated into my life. As I prepare to enter college in Fall 2019, I have a new perspective on what it means to be a leader.