

Lexi Rodriguez-Padilla, WA – 2019

The USSYP Experience

If you would have asked me if I enjoyed politics a year ago I would have said “no.” If you would have asked me my opinions about policies, procedures, and problems in our government, I would have said “I prefer not to answer.” A few short months ago I was able to go on a trip to Washington, D.C.

This was no ordinary trip. This was a week-long experience (and no, I do not use the word experience lightly), named the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP). It was an experience where I learned the ins and outs of our three branches of government. I saw, met, and listened to the politicians you see on TV, but also those civil servants in the background. I saw beautiful monuments commemorating our history. I listened to stories that inspired me that, as a country, we are always moving forward even if we have to take a couple steps back once in a while.

The USSYP experience has taught me a couple things, but my biggest takeaway was that I learned, “You can be passionate about politics no matter what.” I was able to not only learn from guest speakers, and tour guides, but I was also able to learn and be inspired by some of the most inspiring people I have ever met. Those people of course being our truly mind-blowing Military Mentors, who day in and day out took care and pride in helping us make the best of the USSYP experience.

I couldn't finish this essay without mentioning the most brilliant and interesting peers I could ever meet. Walking into USSYP I was already intimidated by all the talent and intelligence I saw in each and every one of the delegates. Over the week I began to see my fellow delegates as more than just an image of innovation and originality, I slowly begin to see each delegate as friends and eventually saw them as my family. I saw that we all had different opinions and we were all on different sides of the political spectrum. And although we had heated arguments and got into these one-sided mindsets, I realized that we could all be more open-minded. And I realized, “You don't have to agree on everything to work together towards improvement.”

I also saw how while many of the students couldn't yet vote, every delegate was politically savvy enough to recognize some of politics' big names, and took out their cameras for the likes of Senators Bernie Sanders and Ted Cruz, (because, yes most of us love fangirling). I realized we all have the same affection for these amazing people making changes in our government.

In the end, I have come to the conclusion that the USSYP experience brought all us delegates together for a reason because I know one day, I hope to reunite with some of my fellow delegates on Capitol Hill. In the end, we all kind of clicked, because we're all going to be there again in Washington, D.C. one day in one way or another, still sharing our ideas and pushing for improvement, because the fact is this big family we created of 104 delegates is just one big group of overachievers, and this is the group that the USSYP created and the group that are going to make change.

So, if you were to ask me if I enjoy politics today, I would still probably say "no." But if you were to ask me about my opinions about policies, procedures, and problems in our government I could sit and talk with you for hours, but what good would that do, because the matter of the fact is there are issues in our government and talking about it with one person can only do so much, and the only true way to make change is to take action. And I can't wait to see what the USSYP delegates of 2019 has in store for their communities, our country, and the world.