

Josie Kaufman, SD – 2021

As I am sure many of my fellow delegates have expressed, it was disappointing not being able to attend Washington Week in person this year. However, the disappointment was short lived as the claimed “Zoom where it happens” began on March 14th. The experience was extremely professional throughout all the speakers and presentations. I learned far more than I could have ever hoped.

For me, Washington Week pleasantly surprised me as we worked our way through the speakers. The highlight of my experience was the question and answer period with the astronauts on the International Space Station. What an amazing opportunity to actually interact with these astronauts that are literally out of this world! Oftentimes, it can be easy to feel a disconnect with certain parts of our government; however, the USSYP made me feel welcome and important to every person we visited. I never once felt like an outsider during any part of the program.

My favorite branch of the government is the Supreme Court. Laws are the one part of the government that affect everyone equally, and the Supreme Court upholds the Constitution to make sure it stays that way. Therefore, speaking with Chief Justice Clarence Thomas felt like a dream. I have looked up to his strength and willpower for a long time and hearing him speak about his own experiences was eye opening. Justice Thomas challenged us to think of the unintended consequences, which forces us to look at the cons of policy before quickly making laws. It is important for my generation and the generations beyond us to think about the good and bad effects of the policy changes we want seen. It is such a blessing to be raised in a country that is able to provide strong leadership, and it is our responsibility as we enter our careers to make sure that our leadership is not misled. Justice Thomas reminded each of the delegates that we have an individual responsibility to uphold the Constitution, so the future of America is not led by lies. “Live not by lies.” It is important to hear all sides of the case and be knowledgeable about the decisions we are making.

The United States Senate Youth Program has also opened many doors for me. I will use this experience to reach out to my senators more often and to become involved with the local government when I can. The USSYP taught me that a slow progression of change is how we can build the nation that we want for the future. Although we are seniors in high school entering college, our impact starts now.

While the program in its entirety was beyond my expectations, my favorite part of the experience were the Military Mentor meetings. The ability to interact with my fellow delegates and speak openly about our different take-aways from the day was the best way to gain an in-person experience. My Mentor made me feel welcome, even though my political views were often in the minority compared to the other delegates. The other delegates were also open to listening to my thoughts from the various sessions. We all learned from each other, and I know that we will all accomplish so much in our respective fields as we begin to build our futures. Plus, I now have a couch to crash on in every state and friends that will work hard to fight for each other’s successes.