

Sara Beth Beasley, TX - 2021

As a small-town high school senior, I never dreamed that I could experience something as impactful and incredible as the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP). Washington Week, although online, was one of the best weeks of my life. The speakers I got to witness and the friendships I made will stay with me forever. After almost not applying, and doubting myself the entire application process, it is not lost on me that this is a perfect example of what it means to be an USSYP alumni. Every single one of the 104 student delegates who participated in this program are driven, ambitious, and accomplished, but that does not mean what I thought it meant before. These students are not fantastic because of their awards or their class rank. These students were not accepted because they wrote the best essay or are in the most clubs. These students participated in this program because they want to change the world in their very own way. Whether that be in office, serving in the Military, or running their own business, my fellow delegates and I have a goal in mind and we are not straying away from it. Washington Week opened my eyes to that truth.

My goal to change the world is through being an astronaut. Therefore, my favorite speaker of Washington Week was former Astronaut Captain Scott Kelly. I had the pleasure of introducing Captain Kelly to the program, and that was an incredible experience. Captain Kelly provided a perspective that I think every ambitious student benefits from. He was transparent about his past and helped us gain the understanding that no matter your past circumstances or how much you struggle, your achievements are not limited. As cliché as it may seem, the only thing holding you back from greatness is yourself. As an aspiring astronaut, those words are dear to my heart. I constantly feel pressured to have the best test scores or be at the very top of my class, but his presentation inspired me to understand what is actually valuable to achieving my goals.

Beyond getting to hear Captain Kelly speak, my Military Mentor group was extremely impactful. Major Boston McClain has, in complete honesty, completely changed my life. Having the ability to break down the day in a small environment with an extremely knowledgeable and encouraging mentor was priceless. Through discourse, each of my mentor group delegates gained new perspectives on issues we used to be firm on and were challenged to get out of our comfort zones politically and socially. The group did not stop there, though. Our Zooms infiltrated our lives. We have already planned future calls to celebrate each other's college decisions and we message every day. Major McClain instilled values in me that I will one day attribute to my successes. He taught us to "shoot our shot," basically meaning that we should not be afraid to be told no. This idea seemed terrifying to me as I spent a week surrounded by some of the most accomplished people in the nation, but I took it to heart. I have thought of that saying every day since Washington Week began.

The United States Senate Youth Program is life-altering. It is much more than an educational week. I have grown as an individual thanks to the lessons I learned, and these friendships will stick with me forever. Delegates and Distinguished Guests, Washington Week may be over, but this is just the beginning.