

Ahmya Rivera, NC – 2022

A quote that I live by is “The best thing you can give someone is a chance – Unknown.” I am grateful for the *chance* to partake in the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) even though it was virtual. As a student in a rural area with limited accessible government exploration opportunities, the USSYP has allowed me to grow and feel empowered enough to pursue my aspirations within public service.

When I found out I was a finalist, honestly, I was surprised. Unlike most current and former Delegates, I have never taken a government course or an AP level writing course as they are not offered to me. Meaning all my governmental and literacy knowledge is from me being an avid autodidactic. Naturally, the night before my delegate interview I stayed up writing down everything I knew – while learning more about the things I didn’t -- when it came to the topics of voting, our government branches, current news, and more. Although this resulted in a 20-page document, it made me well prepared for the interview and inevitably my amazing Washington Week experience. I was excited to share my past and new knowledge with a group of students while providing my perspective as a first-gen, rural, double-minority, in discussions. Not only did Washington Week allow me to do this, but I was provided empowerment by seeing other individuals who were like myself in positions within my areas of interest.

After being selected as a delegate, I was instantly met with a great network of other young leaders. The informal discussions on all social media platforms allowed me to finally develop a refreshing familiarity with a group of students. Previously, I had not known a group of individuals who were interested in the topics of government, policy enactment, or global issues. Unsurprisingly, with many great delegates come *many* great staff members. Distinctly, I want to highlight my astounding military mentor Captain Dryhurst. Before, during, and after the ending of Washington Week, she worked to learn more about us while making sure our whole group stays in close connection. Partaking in the military mentor group sessions was by far my favorite part of the USSYP program as it allowed me to see the unique perspectives and take-aways people can have from a shared experience. I felt able to immerse myself in a new standard of thinking and automatically found myself growing because of it. To this day I keep in contact with other delegates and the members of my military mentor Group, also known as the “Dry-Hearst Foundation,” allowing me to continue growing my network, and keeping a lasting community of supporting, determined, and inspiring individuals.

Not only were the delegates inspiring, but so were the vast array of speakers I was able to learn from through the USSYP.

As said by Senator Susan Collins, “Diverse knowledge, leads to diverse growth,” this quote resonated with me. With the diverse subset of leaders that took time to speak with us, such as Major General Isaacson and Secretary Pete Buttigieg, I was able to grow my knowledge of governmental practices and my philosophies on life approaches. One speech that I remember vividly, is Senator Susan Collins. In her speech, she advocated and promoted a bipartisanship agenda. Thus, I took away the message that you cannot grow unless you are willing to grow in a diverse way from a diverse array of people. Through this philosophy, we promote a truly progressive congress, one that is set on progress through togetherness. Similarly, I discussed bipartisanship in my 2:1 Zoom session with Senator Richard Burr. Where a thought-provoking discussion on the topic of promoting positive change despite political polarization occurred.

I am honored to serve as a USSYP delegate representing North Carolina for the 2022 year. Throughout the program, the clear dedication to making sure I got the most fulfilling experience is highly appreciated and does not go unrecognized. The journey the USSYP has put me on, has allowed me to picture my current and future career in public service more clearly. For years I will think back on the experiences I have been fortunate enough to have these past couple months, utilize them to progress my growth, and then spread my knowledge to progress the growth of others. USSYP staff, speakers, and 2022 delegates, have empowered me enough to feel as though I can more confidentially work to promote positive change in my community and abroad. Thank you all.