

Nicole Miller, NV – 2022

I have always found myself inspired by the world of politics. There is so much to learn from the history of our great nation and the continued legacy of our modern-day government. I was incredibly grateful when I found out that I had been accepted into the United States Senate Youth Program for its 60th anniversary and would have the opportunity to interact with like minded individuals from other states as well as prominent government officials. Although initially I was a bit disappointed that the program would not be taking place in Washington as it does traditionally, the feeling was washed away when I began to see how interactive the program still was on an online platform. I made great friends throughout the program and had meaningful interactions with many delegates.

My USSYP experience started the week before Washington Week when I met Senator Catherine Cortez Masto. It was an amazing opportunity to be able to speak to someone who is active in politics and so involved in the makings of many major decisions in our country. She spoke to us about her journey of getting into politics and how she decided to run for office because she wanted to be an active advocate for her community. I was also able to ask her a few questions, one of them being about the growing youth mental health crisis that Nevada is currently facing. She spoke about the measures that she is currently working towards to assist in resolving the crisis, and I felt very privileged and relieved to know that there would be improvement in the future.

One of my favorite parts of Washington Week was my military mentor group. Before Washington Week, my judgment of the military was crowded by society's stereotypes that characterize it as detached and rough. This could not have been further from the truth. My military mentor, Major Pellegrine, was welcoming and truly enhanced my experience in the program. His story for why he chose to go into the military showed me how impactful a person's service in the military can be. I also engaged in many relevant conversations with the members of my military mentor group; these conversations made me ponder new ideas while also making me consider perspectives that I would typically disagree with. I found these active engagements to be the best way to break down the lessons from the speakers and overall broaden my knowledge of politics.

When we were given the chance to speak to Senator Susan Collins during Washington Week, she told us about her experience years ago when she was in our same place as a delegate. It was remarkable to see the profound impact that her USSYP experience had on her career. She spoke about how when she was our age, her state was one of the only states that had a female senator. Through meeting her senator, she realized it was possible to be a female in politics and that her dream could be a reality. As a young female interested in politics, her story is influential to me and is something that I will forever remember as a female looking to go into a male-dominated career.

I will also take with me a quote from Senator Cory Gardner: "We should be firm in our principles but flexible in our ideas." This really stuck out to me because it reminded me of the need for the bipartisanship that so many of our speakers addressed in the time of our dividing union. It showed me how much of a difference the mindset of each individual makes when it comes to building "a more perfect union."

I am truly thankful to have had the opportunity to speak with such incredible individuals throughout Washington Week. It has ingrained in me a sense of respect for all the work that people in careers of public service do to ensure our nation maintains its democratic nature. It is my great aspiration that I can one day follow in the footsteps of leaders like Senator Susan Collins and enact lasting change for our nation.