

Jack Kelly, NY – 2022

As one of my biggest role models, American civil rights activist Heather Booth, often reminds me, *changing the world* happens at a very granular level. To tackle the biggest issues of our time, from global climate change to widespread social inequality, movements for justice need to be built individual by individual. Participating in the United States Senate Youth Program's (USSYP) Washington Week was truly a transformative experience that gave me and 103 other delegates the opportunity to learn from leaders and government officials, as we embark on the elusive quest of *changing the world*.

Throughout the program, we heard from many incredible people, but in particular, the messages imparted by three speakers really resonated with me. Dr. Betty Koed, the Historian of the United States Senate, was the first of these speakers. She told us three stories: one about Senator Edward P. Costigan and his efforts to pass a federal anti-lynching law in 1934, another about Senator William Proxmire delivering more than 3000 speeches in support of ratifying the Genocide Treaty, and a final story about Senator Carol Moseley Braun persuading the Judiciary Committee to not renew a design patent for the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

The unifying motif in all of these stories was persistence. All three Senators only made progress on their respective issues by staying committed to supporting the policies they wanted enacted at all costs even when they faced political setbacks. Often, I feel frustrated when progress is not made at the pace that I would want it to or when a policy I favor does not pass, but Dr. Koed's speech reminded me that failure is not the end. As we work to build a more perfect union, we must be determined and continue to advocate for what we value no matter how long it takes.

Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield was another memorable speaker, and she told us about the imperative nature of collaboration. Having the perspective of a seasoned diplomat, Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield talked about how when working with other nations, you need to be willing to listen to others and cooperate with the aim of achieving larger shared goals. She told us about how the United Nations is a body that requires effective discourse between countries and how she needs to be willing to have productive conversations with other diplomats from countries all around the world. This lesson is relevant to me because it made me reflect on the fact that humans can achieve great things when we are willing to foster collaboration and work in a united manner towards common desires.

Finally, the last speaker of the conference, Secretary Pete Buttigieg told us about the way he approaches elected office, which has left a profound impression on me. Secretary Buttigieg emphasized how it is essential that everyone always does the best job they can for whatever role they have, no matter how big or small, whether it's as a local school board member or as President of the United States. This concurs with Heather Booth's view about changing the world and it highlights that we all have a part to play in solving the problems of our nation and humanity. Secretary Buttigieg also implored the delegates to go into public service and to run for whatever elected office calls us. Since I aspire to be a public servant like Secretary Buttigieg, his affirmation to go into public service was assuring and made me excited about the thought of choosing a career path where I can maximize my contributions to the public good.

Beyond these three speakers, getting to interact with other delegates was arguably the most impactful part of Washington Week as I got to learn from civically engaged students from all around the country. In Military Mentor debrief Zooms, I listened carefully as my peers shared their reflections and insights about each day. In the diplomacy simulation, I got to hear from delegates who demonstrated exceptional negotiation skills. The 2022 USSYP delegates, my

friends, taught me about where they're from, what they're passionate about, and how they're making an impact in their communities. I'm forever grateful for both their continued friendship and how they have expanded my worldview.

As I've gotten to know this year's delegates through Washington Week and now through continued communication as alumni of the program, I've become confident that the 2022 USSYP delegates will be individuals leading the change of tomorrow. I hope to one day go into public service, and with other USSYP alumni and the lessons learned from Washington Week, I hope to make a positive difference with whatever I do. I hope to *change the world*.