

Arielle Kutz, AZ – 2026

Amazing. Transformational. Loads of fun. How can I describe my experiences during Washington Week to my peers in a brief phrase? How can I convey the self-growth I had undergone in such a short period of time? Eye-opening. Inspirational. Nothing lives up to the caliber, depth, and impact of the United States Senate Youth Program.

USSYP redefined what the government means to me. I learned more about the political processes of the United States than I ever thought possible during the span of one week. As I sat on the benches in the trial room of the Supreme Court, walked the halls of the Pentagon, and enjoyed a three-course meal in the Benjamin Franklin room in the State Department, it became crystal clear in my mind that I had to pursue a career in politics. The energy built up among the 64th delegation inspired me to want to fight for change.

The conversations I had at the U.S. Senate Youth Program were especially memorable for me. Debating the most pressing and controversial topics with students from all different backgrounds, religions, and political beliefs opened my eyes to many unique perspectives. I was able to practice civic disagreement while gaining insight from each discussion, reflecting the true ideals of democracy. Throughout my time at Washington Week, I engaged with the most impressive, intellectually curious, and passionate group of teens that I had ever met. While imposter syndrome plagued me for a moment, I formed connections with my fellow delegates that differed from any relationships I had created before. Our shared experiences and drive bonded us together so closely and quickly.

A highlight of my week was attending the Senate Reception. Despite neither of my Senators being able to participate, being in the presence of 75 of the country's most powerful leaders was truly profound. The excitement in the room was contagious, and I felt like I was at an award show waiting for the stars to cross the red carpet. Having Senator Booker grab my phone from my co-delegate's hand to take a group selfie is something I will never forget. As I saw how the faces of my delegation lit up at the sight of Senator Sanders and the gasps that erupted as Senator Klobuchar stopped to take a photo with all of us, I was reminded of the human element of politics that is not always shown in the press.

Even though no one in my hometown will ever be able to understand, the United States Senate Youth Program allowed me to grow as a leader, learner, and civically engaged citizen. I am forever grateful to the Hearst Foundations, exceptional Military Mentors, the Arizona Department of Education, and all of the staff involved with USSYP for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. And of course, the biggest shoutout to the most special delegation I could have spent Washington Week with.