

Kloss Brown, OK – 2026

The question “how was USSYP?” is one I’ve heard hundreds of times since I’ve returned but without doubt every time I stare at whoever asked me blankly. I don’t do this because I didn’t like the program, I don’t do this because there is not enough to talk about, I do this because the experience I had isn’t meant for words. Even the most amazing words such as fantastic, fun, life changing don’t even come close to fully encapsulating the USSYP experience. How can I put into words the bond that I made with 104 other students instantly? These students went from strangers to lifelong friends in seconds. How do I explain that? How do I explain how it felt to meet the leaders of this country, I mean we got to sing this little light of mine with Martin Luther King Jr.’s niece. How do I explain that feeling? how do I explain the impact that 17 extraordinary Military Mentors had on me, from teaching me so many lessons to karaoke at nighttime how do I explain that impact?

Every time before I left when I was asked what I was most excited about I would say meeting with the top level officials or gaining so much first hand insight into DC and don’t get me wrong those were so fantastic of the program, but one thing I failed to think about when originally asked this question is the connections I was going to make. Now, as I said before I can’t put into words how I feel towards my 104 co-delegates but I will certainly try! When I first walked into that ballroom and saw everyone from all 50 states I was scared. I thought me, just a kid from Oklahoma wouldn’t fit in but boy was I wrong. Immediately everyone made that room feel like home from the first person I met, Feven at the airport, to the last person I met that night before we left, Esther, because sadly somehow we dodged each other all week. The environment that the delegates created was amazing. We walked in there and preconceived notions went out the window. No one judged anyone for their differences, but we loved each other for them. I am now happy to say I’m a part of a 2026 USSYP Community!

As I said, before I left when I was asked what I was looking forward to most I would usually say meeting the top level officials and that did not disappoint every single person that made time for us was amazing I truly have never learned so much about a topic that interests me so much in such a short amount of time. One speaker that truly stood out to me was Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, when she entered the room it was like I became frozen it wasn’t because I didn’t know what to say, it wasn’t because I was lost it was because I couldn’t believe I was in the presence of such a glass ceiling shattering woman. She has accomplished so many firsts being the first Black woman Supreme Court Justice, being the first public defender to become a Supreme Court Justice and so many more. When I saw her I was in shock. It was like I couldn’t move. The first time she said, “I’ll take questions now” almost nearly all 104 hands went up including mine I never thought in 1 million years that she would pick me out of a crowd of my peers but when she did I almost shut down, getting to ask her a question and having her answer me and respond to me was truly such an amazing experience. Her words were so insightful every single word taught me something that I would never know without her. I am so grateful to have been in her presence and to have heard from her.

As I’m nearing the end of my two pages there’s one group of people I’ve yet to talk about. This group of people might have been the most life-changing for me. Of course I’m talking about Military Mentors. When I got there I had no idea how those 17 people would impact my life and all of my other delegate lives. I thought they’d just be there bossing us around but little did they know that they would quickly become my best friends whether they liked it or not. The lessons I’ve learned from the speakers were undoubtedly amazing but the lessons I learned from the Military Mentors that spent all week with us were life-changing. I can’t believe I got to experience this with them and I am beyond grateful for them.

Now from now on when I get asked how USSYP was maybe I’ll freeze a little but I’ve come up with the one word that encompasses everything. This one word shows the connections I made. It shows the lessons I’ve learned and it shows the unity we have. This one word shows how 105 strangers became the closest friends I’ve ever had, this one word shows how 17 mentors became idols. This one word that encompasses the program can be no other than family.