

Zoie Francisco, MO – 2019

“A Vision of the Future”

With the many issues that our nation has had to face within the past century, many worry about what this country is going to look like in the next 10 years. Let me tell you-- it's looking revolutionary, knowledgeable, accepting, and ready to face the challenges of tomorrow. The future that I am seeing is led by each of the delegates that I have met during the United States Senate Youth Program's (USSYP) Washington Week.

On the flight going to Washington D.C., I was feeling a deep sense of “imposter syndrome,” and when I got there, it only got worse. I was suddenly surrounded by an overwhelming number of people who were informed and passionate in their views. These were truly the most intuitive people I have met in my lifetime. At that point, I decided I would utilize this experience to listen and learn.

The lunch and dinner tables were always buzzing with respectful discussions whether it was about laws, politics, the latest Supreme Court case, or sometimes, just our favorite movies. As for my experience, I tried to listen more than talk. I couldn't help it. It felt so enriching for me to absorb the ideas that each of the speakers, military mentors, and the other delegates gave – I never would've heard them without the USSYP.

One of the speeches that resonated with me most was the speech given by Senator Blumenthal of Connecticut at the National Archives. He directly addressed each of the issues that I felt most passionately about. He gave his honest views on education reform, immigration, and politics in Washington, and hearing these things right next to the original Constitution and Declaration of Independence only made the experience even more unreal. Each of us had an exclusive look on many of the most influential people in Washington – it was different from any experience of watching them on TV or listening to them in a crowd. This felt intimate because we were truly free to ask them and ask each other what each and every word meant. Each speaker gave us another opportunity to talk, and to listen.

Someone I definitely had to listen to – Captain Frost. As our Military Mentor she gave us instructions on what to do within the nut free zones, but behind all of the work she was doing to protect us, she was also working to inspire us. I remember as I was cracking jokes with some friends at the Department of State, she walked up to me and said: “get some knowledge.” While I never stopped making fun of her at the time, I realized that this was exactly what USSYP was doing for me. It was helping me gain more insight that I ever would have laying in bed reading the news.

These are the kinds of experiences that I hope every student in America can get one day. Having immigrated to the United States five years ago, I still have a lot to learn, but I will never forget the valuable lessons of humility, curiosity, and camaraderie that USSYP has taught me. Looking back at this experience, I am more excited than ever to see what this country will look like in the next 10 years.