

Jacob Flick, ID – 2021

Words cannot describe the gratitude and appreciation that I have for the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) and the experiences that it provided. There were many great speakers and activities that gave me great insight into our nation's government and how it functions. That being said, there were definitely some specific speakers that I enjoyed more than others, as well as activities that boded the same. I would like to share my personal experiences in the program through highlights and downfalls from my perspective.

First, I would like to share that I did not altogether enjoy the process of an online/Zoom conference. I feel that, although it was more flexible for the speakers, it detracted from the true benefits of interacting in person. You miss a lot of grandeur, as well the more subtle notes of a speech, by having it on Zoom. The only part that may still be more beneficial on zoom would be the Supreme Court Justice section. I was informed by Jakub Mosur that Justice Clarence Thomas was able to be much more personable via zoom. This was also my favorite speaker session due to Justice Thomas's openness with us delegates and the sharing of his experiences and what he believed was most important.

Justice Clarence Thomas covered many different topics, but his broader ideas are what stuck with me the most. My favorite part of the session was where he told the delegates how he had grown up a strong liberal and was filled with hate about how African Americans were being treated in the South. To overcome his hate, however, he had to first understand it more. He stepped back and analyzed the root of his feelings and why he felt that way. This eventually led to a complete swap in his political beliefs because he truly understood himself and was honest with himself. This idea linked to one of my second favorite speaker's quotes about always being the most knowledgeable person in a room. To succeed you need to truly understand yourself and your situations. Being prepared and being honest were two overarching ideas that showed up many times throughout the convention.

My second favorite takeaway was how nearly every speaker entered their position by simply taking hold of opportunities. You can be the smartest person, but if you don't take advantage of the situation and be proactive, you may never accomplish much. This idea was portrayed in almost every single session. This became one of my favorite topics during our mentor groups, which happened to be my third and final highlight that I would like to share with you.

The mentor discussion groups that met every morning and evening were a great way of meeting some fellow delegates and challenging viewpoints in a very respectful manner. The diverse mix of individuals brought so many different perspectives to the table that allowed me to challenge myself and my own beliefs against theirs, as well as try and expand their vision. To me, the best way towards fixing our country is having conversations like those that I had in these groups. My special thanks go out to my mentor Lieutenant Commander Roberto Concepcion for his advice and efforts to make the week everything it could be for us.

Washington Week ONLINE was an amazing experience and I am beyond grateful to have been a part of it. I sincerely hope that next year it can be in person and that the delegates are able to have as great of an experience as I. I thank all of the staff and supporters who helped to put this on, as well as the Hearst Foundations. Thank you to you all.