

Eli Terry, NM - 2021

The process of the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) scholarship started with the idea of learning. Learning about the government and what I can do or be in order to more fully understand the ideals and inner workings of our government. Furthermore, I was enticed by a ten thousand dollar scholarship and a Washington trip. I began with the application process, not really knowing if I had the right skills or abilities to fulfill such a goal. After writing the essay and being chosen as a finalist, USSYP built the expectations I had for myself. The finalist Zoom interview was at first nerve wracking. I prepared by reviewing AP government test items, reading *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, watching debates, and talking to a couple of political leaders in New Mexico. To my surprise the interview process was actually one of the most thrilling days! I was ready and felt it. After the interview, I participated in a debate with two other finalists. This is when I realized all the finalists were quality students and I enjoyed being able to debate with them.

I was chosen as one of the two delegates for New Mexico, a true honor I shared along with Eric Sommala of New Mexico. We worked together to represent New Mexico in our Roll Call of the States video. We also met with Senator Heinrich, a highlight to my experience with a New Mexico leader. During these preparations and events before Washington week, I realized the value of the connection I will have with my other state delegate and truly enjoyed the process.

Then came a week of wonders. Sadly, it could not be in person, but it was a complete and fulfilling experience even via Zoom. I would like to start by saying that each event included in Washington Week was well thought out, professional, educational and most of all inspirational. I gained much insight from each speaker and each tour. First, the tours delivered on the educational and informational points and places of history. This information allowed me to build a good picture of notable places in our nation and government. Next, my Military Mentor in charge of my breakout group was Major Hanrahan, he provided good insight and helped to challenge our group to talk about the experience daily. Then, there were definitely many speakers that met me on a level that I felt was truly life changing. My personal favorite speakers included Norah O'Donnell, Captain Scott Kelly, Dr. Anthony Fauci, Justice Clarence Thomas, Brian Kamoie and Noah Harris. As I reviewed my notes to write this essay, I saw their quotes come alive again and will share them with you now. "The quality of your life depends on the quality of your relationships" Norah O'Donnell. "Be willing to take risks and fail" and "know what you can control" Captain Scott Kelly, "Please keep an open mind and always look to things that you are excited about and makes you happy" Dr. Anthony Fauci, "It's a lot of work to be an individual" Justice Clarence Thomas, "Your work speaks for itself" Brian Kamoie, "We are the solution to the issues we face" Noah Harris

I especially enjoyed speaking to and learning from Dr. Francis Collins. This incredible man has a job that I see as stressful, complex, complicated, problematic, annoying, and my list goes on and on. Although his job can be this way at times, he talks about how much he loves it; he is very passionate about what he does and who he does it with. I wondered why he talked about his job as if he is talking about one of his hobbies, or something that he loved and cherished. Then I found that it was exactly as it seemed. I find that if you love what you do your life will be more fulfilling. He is not putting on a fake face and personality but is genuinely living his dream. I admire this and want to be able to be like him one day in that aspect.

The overall impact that USSYP had for me is that it's better to follow your passion in your career and life than to not follow your passion to try and please everyone else. Another overall impact is that I noticed that many of the speakers did not know what they wanted to do at my age, and this was helpful for me to know that I don't need to have my career set in stone yet or to have my life planned out, but it's good to have a plan. The USSYP experience delivered on its promise to reach out to youth leaders and give them an opportunity to understand our government. I am interested in government as a part of my future, and I now have confidence in my ability to work toward that goal. However, for me, USSYP gave me much more than a desire to pursue government, it gave me a different way to view my capabilities and myself as a whole. USSYP took down some barriers. It opened up a path I could not see. It showed me I could approach life without all the answers as long as I will learn. It encouraged me to look for solutions, take risks and work hard. USSYP helped me to see I can be one individual who can make a difference.