

Kayla Morrison, CO – 2022

Although my United States Senate Youth Program experience this year was virtual, I am grateful to have had such an engaging, insightful, and informative experience over the course of the four days.

Because of our program being remote, I was initially afraid I wouldn't be able to connect with my fellow delegates as deeply as I could in-person. However, this concern quickly dissipated as soon as I met my fellow Colorado delegate and recorded our video for the "Roll Call of the States." Conversing with my co-delegate, we had many of the same interests and had much in common to discuss. I found that this also became applicable to my relationships with the other delegates. Through utilizing online platforms such as our delegate hangouts, Military Mentor groups, and various group-chats, I was able to connect with an amazing group of student leaders who inspired me. I have no doubt that the connections I formed with my fellow delegates will be crucial as we forge a better future together.

Furthermore, the discussions I participated in within the course of the program were thoughtful and enlightening. Much of the time, my Military Mentor group engaged in discussions on issues we were passionate about, such as standardized testing within schools. When the program day came to a close and we debriefed within our Military Mentor groups, much of our discussions also centered around the speakers we heard from that day. My fellow delegates and I were able to share with each other the speaking points that stood out to us, and also recommend each other supplemental material covering the topic. For instance, on Day Three of our program, we had the chance to hear from Speakers Carmen Romero, the NATO Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy, and Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. Afterwards, my Military Mentor group had a particularly active discussion because of both of these officials' connections to the Russian war on Ukraine. Throughout these discussions, delegates shared their varying opinions, and I was able to challenge my own stances and respectfully discuss controversial topics with people whom I enjoyed listening to and understanding.

Lastly, I had never before gotten to hear from government officials themselves in this manner, and the officials who were able to speak during our program were very inspiring to me in regard to my personal journey with leadership. Our guest speakers were varying in what they spoke about, which I deeply appreciated. Some speakers chose to use their time explaining controversial issues in their scope of work that many of my fellow delegates and I were curious about, while others chose to use the majority of their time for questions my peers and I had, while others gave more life-focused advice. Particularly, Major General Isaacson spoke about the importance of teamwork, selflessness and accountability within the public service field. Listening to Major General Isaacson speak about the importance of public service work resonated with me and my devotion and passion for people.

In 2020, I had originally applied to the United States Senate Youth Program but was ultimately not accepted. I am forever grateful that I decided to apply again the following year, for I would not have had the opportunity to be part of this amazing experience. Throughout the course of the four days, my passion for political and community organizing was further solidified, and I am even more excited at the prospect of continuing my educational and career journey within this field.