

Kaitlyn Kirchner, MN – 2022

Being part of the USSYP program has been a once in a lifetime opportunity. The friendships I have made with my fellow MN delegate and other student delegates will last a lifetime. Although I was disappointed the program couldn't be in person, the program director and the Hearst Foundation still made Online Washington Week an incredible experience to be a part of. I often get asked by people what the best part of the week was. This question always seems to stump me, even many weeks later. However, I have taken numerous key points and knowledge away from my experience participating in Washington Week.

The first key point I have taken away is that there is a bright future ahead for the United States of America and the world. Meeting all the other delegates and hearing about their passions to make the world a better place gives me hope. Being a part of this program showed me that there are more people than just me trying to make a difference in the U.S. There isn't just one problem that all the delegates are passionate about solving. Delegates are interested in a variety of issues: education, food insecurities, social justice, healthcare, foreign policy, among many others. This shows that delegates aren't going to change just one aspect of the world for the better, but many.

Secondly, I enjoyed taking away knowledge and key insight about the war in Ukraine from Carmen Romero (NATO Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy) and General Mark A. Milley (Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff). It isn't everyday that someone, especially a high school student, gets to ask questions and have a conversation with someone from NATO and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Having the opportunity to listen to these two couldn't have come at a better time.

The third key point I took away was the importance of bipartisanship. Senator Susan M. Collins of Maine did an amazing job explaining to delegates the challenges that comes with finding bipartisanship today in politics. It is important for Senators to compromise today at the U.S. Capital, otherwise it is almost impossible to sign any bills into law. Senator Collins' tips and recommendations on how to gain bipartisanship for bills will be very beneficial for any government elected position I someday find myself in.

Lastly, I have taken away that I am never too young to start changing the world. Listening to former U.S. Senator of Colorado and 1993 USSYP Colorado Delegate, Cory Gardner, speak about his story of making a difference in education by organizing a walk-out in high school inspired me to continue to try and make change in this world, no matter my age. The story he shared with us, the delegates, proved that.

I am incredibly thankful to have been given this great opportunity and take many key points and knowledge away from this once in a lifetime experience. I am excited to continue to stay in touch with my fellow delegates and hopefully meet all of them in person one day.