

Yunseo Kim, NM - 2022

When I was younger, I used to think of government as the center stage of a play, except mostly run by old guys with suits. As a young girl who lives in a small town in New Mexico, I have always felt like an eager spectator, watching this play without a particular role for myself. My perspective however changed greatly through the USSYP, for I was given a life-changing opportunity to peek through the stage curtain and actually interact with not only the “well-known actors” I look up to, but also the “backstage crew” who is actually running the show behind the scenes so much more than we can see. The USSYP experience has inspired me to not just be an observer, sitting quietly out of sight, but rather an active risk-taker, involved and dedicated to making this “show” the best in the world.

An incredible moment of the USSYP was meeting Mr. Pete Buttigieg, the current Secretary of Transportation. Secretary Buttigieg has been such an inspiring role model in my life, from his work as “Mayor Pete” in South Bend, Indiana, to running for President of the United States. One of my favorite anecdotes from Secretary Buttigieg was in response to a delegate asking about his path and growth to leadership: “It’s fine if you don’t have it all figured out. It’s also fine to know what you want and find out you were wrong.” Hearing these words from such a driven, passionate, and successful person was so comforting, for in this fast-paced world, we are faced too often with questions like ‘*What are you going to become?*’ or ‘*What are you going to do with your life?*’ Instead, Secretary Buttigieg’s emphasis on the lifetime journey, experimentation, and courage to put yourself out there for the sake of others was exactly the words I had been wanting to hear my whole life. Just like Secretary Buttigieg, I hope I can nurture my love for serving others even if my passions take me down unexpected paths.

It was also an absolute honor and privilege to hear from Senate Historian Dr. Koed. She shared with us the stories of influential leaders Edward Costigan, William Proxmire, and Carol Moseley-Braun, who stood firm in their beliefs against the most powerful odds and chose to never give up. Dr. Koed’s touching words on how failure is never the end of our own stories resonated very deeply with me, and her challenge for us to strive to create a more perfect Union in our own lives, as stated in the Constitution, was very memorable. In addition, her thoughts on the importance of diversity in history and our generation’s role in bolstering civic engagement of the future were very inspirational. It was a delight to speak with Dr. Koed and to see how she has made a long-lasting impact in the Senate by highlighting the underrepresented voices and experiences of women. Particularly, her words, ‘Lasting change rarely comes quickly, it takes small incremental steps over time,’ will last with me for a lifetime, for I wish to persevere through the many challenges involved with public policy in order to truly fight for others.

I am proud to say the International Focused Day of Washington Week stole my heart. After serving at a refugee camp a few years ago, my dream has been to serve various international communities. This whole day of Washington Week felt like an open door to endless opportunities I have dreamed about, and it was especially a privilege to hear more about International Relations from Linda Thomas Greenfield, United States Ambassador to the United Nations, and Carmen Romero, Deputy Assistant Secretary-General for Public Diplomacy of NATO. In addition to the incredible speakers, the International Diplomacy Simulation of the Suez Canal Crisis was also one of my favorite parts of the whole program! I was actually a bit nervous about the diplomacy simulation before it happened, for I wasn’t sure what to expect with an online format. But in the end, it became my favorite part through everyone’s energy, collaboration, and dedication! Regardless of a zoom format, the student discussions, compromises, and civil discourse were all so engaging and thrilling! Everyone’s commitment and enthusiasm to their roles made the simulation unique, and it was also interesting to see how

far we would take our separate positions when making deals or exchanges. The simulation really fulfilled my wishes to interact more with my fellow delegates, something we, unfortunately, couldn't do in person this year due to COVID-19.

The USSYP absolutely delivered on its promise to empower youth leaders and give us an opportunity to truly understand our government! As I am from quite a small town in New Mexico, there have been limited perspectives and opportunities when growing up. But through the USSYP, I was shown a new world of possibilities. Being surrounded by diverse, skilled, and passionate peers across the nation who have such a desire and love for public service, politics, and policy was awe-inspiring. I leave this program now possessing a deeper understanding of our government, but even more so with passion, motivation, and inspiration to serve my community, country, and world. I cannot thank the Senate Youth Program and the Hearst Foundations enough for such an incredible, powerful, and memorable week. I have so much faith in each and every one of my fellow delegates, and just like the incredible Vanita Gupta said, I will be "animated every day by a sense of hope for our country."