

## Emma Curtright, AZ – 2023

To say that I was honored to be a United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) delegate from Arizona would be the greatest of understatements. When my JROTC instructor shared the USSYP application with me, I knew it would be a very long shot. I am a Navajo student attending an extremely rural Title 1 school where almost everyone is on the free and reduced lunch program. Opportunities like this seem so far out of reach. I don't have enough synonyms to express how incredibly grateful I am to have represented Arizona.

My favorite speaker was General Mark Milley. He really inspired a love for my country, for service, and for my fellow man. He said, "We take an oath to a document that represents an idea. It says that all of us will be free and equal. It doesn't matter what we look like, where we come from...things we can't control... The purpose of our republic is to work towards a more perfect union." He also talked about the importance of supporting those with mental health challenges. This was so relevant for my own community.

My peers are really struggling. Social media, poverty, the pandemic and a myriad of other factors have created a generalized sense of apathy and hopelessness that we *have* to overcome. The future of our communities—even our planet, depends on our efforts to persevere. My experiences at USSYP helped *me* to feel inspired. I feel hopeful that there is a place for my generation and our ideas. I long for my peers to experience some of that hope.

Some of the messages that really stood out to me included, "Say yes!" from Soledad O'Brien, "and do more things so that you may gain experience...failures can be blessings in disguise." Senator Shelley Moore Capito exclaimed, "Don't be afraid to fail, move on!" Justice Sonia Sotomayor shared that no matter how right she feels about a case, there is still empathy for the other side that lost. She shared a message of hope for the future. It's important that we do *something* even when we aren't sure we can do anything. Her words helped me to know I can do something, no matter how small, to make our world a better place.

Our Military Mentors were so supportive and inspiring. For me to have a chance to meet other leaders, mentors, and students who want to help their communities just as much as I do was incredible. To walk the halls of our nation's most hallowed places, to dine right next to the *original* Declaration of Independence, and to listen at the feet of our nation's top leaders. This is the amazing, life-changing experience of Washington Week. The new connections, friendships, and support of other alumni will be of lifelong importance to me.

And the food was delicious!