

Anushka Rawat, MO – 2023

Delegates and Distinguished Guests,

By the end of the week, this phrase indicating the start of a new experience with a new speaker integrated itself into my vocabulary. Participating in the United States Senate Youth Program was an incredibly rewarding and memorable experience for me. Throughout the duration of the program, I heard from esteemed leaders of both parties with contrasting views and backgrounds. I had the opportunity to hear from Democratic Senator John Hickenlooper and Republican Senator Shelley Moore Capito. Despite their apparent differences in background, beliefs, and future plans, they emphasized our community's success is based on collaboration and cooperation. Their message highlighting the importance of bipartisanship was only proven time and time again, as I conversed with delegates from all walks of life. At the close of USSYP, the friendships I made were not confined within a single party, nor were they confined based on ideals. Ultimately, through insightful conversations with my new friends, I learned to actively listen to others, analyze and learn from various viewpoints, and communicate my opinions courteously and constructively.

Attending USSYP helped me look beyond my state of Missouri. It forced me to step outside of my St. Louis bubble. This opportunity to learn from and engage with some of the most knowledgeable and accomplished individuals in our government, such as Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor and General Mark Milley, will be one I will remember for a lifetime. Through this program, I gained a deeper understanding of the inner workings of our democracy and the important role that young people can play in shaping our nation's future. Overall, the program provided me with a fun and meaningful experience that has had a lasting impact on my personal and professional development.

However, the largest impact USSYP has had on my life is the confidence and family it has provided me. Walking into USSYP, I was nervous to meet our nation's best and brightest high schoolers. I was unsure if I truly deserved to attend such a prestigious program. As the week progressed, this sense of imposter syndrome was replaced by a newfound sense of confidence within myself and laughter as I found my people. From Shawn's version of "You Belong With Me" and late night caucus meetings to the Eisenhower Memorial and coach rides around our nation's capital, I can only dream of reliving USSYP.

To end, USSYP was a life-changing experience that expanded my governmental knowledge, which only further enhanced my interest in public policy and politics. I would like to extend a huge thank you to The Heart Foundations, Military Mentors (shout out to Captain Heaps #LostLuggage), and my fellow delegates. I am confident that each and every one of my fellow delegates will make a substantial impact on our world and I am excited to see what the future holds under the leadership of our generation.