

Sudhiksha Ramesh, OH – 2024

When I found out that I was one of the delegates who would represent Ohio in the 62nd USSYP Washington Week last December, it would be an understatement to say that I was ecstatic. But no matter how many times I scrolled through old Instagram feeds of past delegates, trying to grasp what to expect, my experience was far superior to anything I could have imagined.

Each breakfast, lunch, and dinner was not only accompanied by some of the most fantastic food I've ever eaten (still dreaming about the white chocolate Capitol dome), hand tricks to figure out which side my drink and bread went, but insightful conversations with the inspiring Military Mentors, as well as conversations with delegates on some of the incredible things we were doing for public service and our communities.

I still remember Brian Kamoie's words as he told us that "the ones who are crazy enough to think they can change the world... will." However, during my weeklong experience with my 103 delegates, I realized that I had already met young individuals who had changed the world.

But more than that, Justice Elena Kagan's words about disagreeing with her colleagues on a professional level but still being able to respect each other taught me the importance of valuing each other's stories and backgrounds, which inform the decisions we make in our daily lives.

On our first day together, we were told the importance of bridging polarization in our nation, starting with our week together. With the conversations I had with delegates and speakers alike, I can truly say that I walked out of this experience not only with friends that I will cherish for a lifetime but also with an important lesson on respecting others in an incredibly polarized political environment.

Throughout my life, there has not been a single moment where I laughed, cried, and felt as deeply as I did during my time at USSYP. It was an experience that touched me to the core, evoking emotions that I hadn't known I was capable of experiencing. The laughter shared during late-night conversations in shared dorm rooms, the tears shed as we said our goodbyes, and the overwhelming sense of camaraderie that permeated every interaction—all of these moments are etched into my memory forever.

As I reflect on those intense emotions, I realize that USSYP isn't just a scholarship program or a week of being able to visit the most historical places in our country—it was a journey of self-discovery and growth. It pushed me out of my comfort zone, exposed me to new ideas and perspectives, and challenged me to confront my biases and preconceptions. Through it all, I emerged stronger, more resilient, and more determined to positively impact the world around me—inspired by the 103 best friends I have made and the numerous speakers who will continue to inspire my work in public service.

Looking back, I wouldn't trade this experience for anything else. As I move forward, I carry with me the lessons I learned, the friendships I forged, and the memories I will cherish for a lifetime. One week proved to be just a fleeting moment in the company of the remarkable individuals I encountered. Even a million years wouldn't suffice for me to fully process and reflect upon the depth of this transformative experience.