

## Gianna Frank, WA – 2024

My USSYP experience I believe was much different than my fellow delegates. I had no intention of going into government nor did I have a vast background or prior knowledge of the system of government before entering the program, but through the encouragement of my best friend, I decided to apply. In no way did I believe that I would be chosen as one of the delegates to represent the entire state of Washington. It was a surreal moment, but I was not prepared for the events that I was about to experience in my Washington week. Although my tone in writing this is very intriguing and enthusiastic, I was in fact the opposite going in the beginning of March. I was completely terrified. As boastful as it sounds, there weren't many rooms that I would walk in where I didn't feel as if my capabilities as a leader weren't competent, but the days leading up to my departure were agonizing because, in all honesty, I felt that I was going to be the most idiotic, incompetent delegate in the room. However, over the course of the week, that perspective started to change. After the first couple of days of getting to know my peers, even though my demeanor and mindset at the beginning of the week were a little timid, I gradually opened up. From the moment I stepped off the plane and was greeted by my fellow delegates and Military Mentors, I knew this week was going to be different than I anticipated.

The whole Washington Week was absolutely amazing and far beyond what I could ever imagine, but there were certain aspects of the week that made it even more miraculous than I knew could be possible. First, one of my favorite places to visit was the Department of Justice. Speaking with Assistant Attorney General Kristen Clarke was so intriguing to me because seeing someone who looked like me in such a position of power was so encouraging and inspiring, knowing that there is nothing stopping me to potentially be in that position one day if I wanted to be. She gave great insight on a question that I had asked about how we as students can help try to protect our student body as leaders when addressing racial hate crimes and death threats when it disrupts the learning environment for BIPOC students trying to receive a public education. The DOJ was an eye-opening but also motivational destination, but I think the place that will forever have my heart is the National Archives.

While I was walking through the museum, I came across the civil rights and slavery section, and to my surprise, I started to cry. No one saw, but I couldn't help the streams down my face. Standing there and reading the real documents of my people, buying their families back from slavery or even fighting for the freedoms that I enjoy today, overwhelmed me in a sense where it felt more real than ever. My people were whipped, beaten, hung, lynched, shot, and even killed just so that I could have a chance. An opportunity. But what broke me the most was the fact that out of 104 delegates, as being one out of the seven black delegates, I knew my ancestors were looking down on me proudly. Proud that their labor was not vain. Proud that they did not die without reason. Proud that their daughter and sister in Christ was able to do things that they couldn't imagine being possible. She was able to go down to the DOJ and question authority. She was able to walk to the Capitol, inside the Supreme Court, and even talk to a Supreme Court Justice. She was able to see and to talk to Senators, with the Secretary of State, and she was even able to walk into the gates of the White House not as a servant or a slave, but as a guest.

At that moment on day four in the Archives was the moment that I realized that I belonged. I wasn't the smartest. I wasn't the most knowledgeable about government or a lot of things for that matter. I wasn't the best public speaker. I wasn't the most confident. Shoot, I wasn't even the funniest (Peyton White definitely beat me there), but I belong. I realized I didn't need to be any one of those things to have a spot at the table. To have conversations with my peers and great leaders of influence. I was 100% qualified to be a delegate for the United States Senate Youth Program because I earned my spot alongside everyone else there. I have two quotes that summarize my Washington week and I'm certain are my new favorites, the first being, "I don't care if my name is attached to anything, I just want to make a difference." - Gen. Charles Brown. It doesn't matter if I get recognized for the things that I do in my time here, it just matters that I made a difference for the generations behind me to come. At the end of the day, it is what you do for others, not the other way around. The second quote is, "What is it that you plan to do with your one wild, precious life?" - Brian Kamoie. No matter, if I choose a career within the government, or even become a pediatric neuropsychologist, I want to do something to serve others. The whole theme of Washington week is to help us develop and learn servant leadership firsthand. It doesn't matter if you're a schoolteacher, or the leader of the free world, anything that you can do to serve others is a career worth doing. We only have one wild and precious life and it is up to us how we want to utilize it in order to change the world for the better.