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USSYP 2024

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United States Senate Youth Program 62nd Annual Washington Week Reflection

One word: Unforgettable. From the solemn respect at Arlington National Cemetery to the once-in-a-lifetime experience of meeting the 46th President of the United States face to face, it's safe to say that the short but overflowing United States Senate Youth Program's Washington Week will never be forgotten. Most delegates will call the United States Senate Youth Program a trajectory-changing event. While this may seem cliché on the front end, once the week was all said and done, the saying rang true. As a delegate from Arizona, I wasn't sure what to expect, so let's start from the beginning.

In the Fall of 2023, my options were wide open and I had no clear path forward. I knew that I wanted to have a background in cybersecurity/defense and enter one or multiple of three industries: Politics, law, and business/entrepreneurship. Naturally, I started searching for opportunities. My mother encouraged me to look into more prestigious scholarships, and one caught my attention immediately; the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP). It wasn't like any scholarship I had seen before. Most scholarships just give a lump sum and congratulate you for the achievement. However, the USSYP was different in that it was directly involved with the United States Senate, and came with an opportunity not just to visit Washington DC for a week, but rather to experience and develop a more concrete knowledge of our nation's inner workings.

The application process was exciting and quite enjoyable. I wrote a few essays, filmed a quick video, and sent all my information in. When I found out that I was selected as one of the

ten finalists for Arizona, I was honored and ecstatic. I was then invited to the Arizona Department of Education with the other finalists to compete for one of the two spots to represent Arizona. The other finalists were quite impressive, getting to know them throughout the day was riveting which was comprised of a civics exam, speeches, and a tour of the Arizona Capitol. After all was said and done, we went home to await the results. To say I was excited when I received the news that I was one of the USSYP delegates would be a ludicrous understatement.

Over the next few months, I prepared as much as I could between Speech & Debate tournaments for the week. When it was finally time to board the plane to DC, what I was about to experience hadn't fully hit me yet. I had a layover in Atlanta where I met a few of the other delegates flying up to Washington. When we finally arrived, it was beautiful. In Southern Arizona, the usual is rocks, dirt, and cacti; a change of scenery was pleasant. We arrived at the Mayflower Hotel midafternoon, checked in our bags, and received our nametags and backpacks while getting to know the students we would be spending a week with. The week officially started with a buffet-style dinner attended by Alumni of the program sitting at tables respective to the industry they currently work in, ranging from nurses to intelligence community members. I rotated between the Information Technology, Business, Law, and Government tables speaking with Alumni from as recent as last year and as long ago as 1989. One sentiment was recurring throughout all of the conversations I had that night, the United States Senate Youth Program changed their life.

Later that night we heard from Bill Doherty, the Co-Founder of Braver Angels, an organization created to encourage depolarization in America. He encouraged us to remember that no matter what, regardless of beliefs, we are all still Americans and should treat each other as decent human beings. We then went into a conversation to explain where we thought the

polarization in America came from. Ironically, a handful of delegates concluded that Ronald Reagan was the problem. This proved that even when discussing polarization and how to decrease it, the disdain for opposing thought bled through.

The next morning began with Pete Buttigieg, the Secretary of Transportation, speaking about his experience in the program as an Alumnus from Indiana in 2000. He also gave various talking points about transportation in the United States, as well as what their goals are, and how they are implementing them. The floor then opened to a question and answer period where questions about social equity, specific transportation agendas, and China, a theme that would be echoed throughout the week as a topic of concern. My question asked what we should do about China stealing our section 30D, 45X, and 48C subsidies provided by the Inflation Reduction Act, going directly against the goals to increase American domestic manufacturing and decrease reliance on China. Pete Buttigieg said, “China recognizes the advantages that renewable technology and transportation pose and they are attempting to dominate America in this field as part of their Belt and Road Initiative. This must stop as the Inflation Reduction Act’s purpose is to build America, not another country.” It would become further evident during the week that even though the general public does not fully see the threat posed by China, the United States Government does. In reality, China is worse now than Russia ever was during the Cold War.

The speaker that impacted me the most during the week was Brian Kamoie, a USSYP Alumni, former National Security Council Advisor, and current Managing Director at Deloitte. He was the speaker that showed me that what I wanted to do was realistic. He started in law, then proceeded to move back and forth between public and private industry eventually drifting towards cybersecurity, which happens to be close to exactly what I intend to pursue. Whenever he was told he was needed, he found a way to make it work, a virtue I admire. I saw so much of

myself in Mr. Kamoie and intend to keep in touch with him over LinkedIn where we have already had in-depth, very useful conversations.

Other speakers we heard from included the Senate Advisory Committee Co-Chairs, Senators Catherine Cortez Masto and John Barrasso, the Senate Parliamentarian Elizabeth MacDonough, Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan, Assistant Secretary of State Bill Russo, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Senator Bill Cassidy, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Charles Brown Jr., and the highlight of the week, the President and First Lady of the United States, Joe and Jill Biden. All of which were amazing and shaped the week as a whole.

The experiences and the inspiring, driven individuals I met and spoke with have all aided in solidifying my next steps in my life. I learned that my passion for public service and policy went deeper than I had originally thought. As the 21st century continues, greater portions of our lives are affected by technology. This week showed me that my goal must be to influence the intersection of government, law, and technology for the better. Not only did I learn what my goal should be, but the United States Senate Youth Program opened many doors to allow me to pursue that end. The principal from my Military Mentor Captain Daniel McGurkin will stick with me as I continue through the early stages of my life, remembering that I'm here to serve others, that "It's not about me."