

Maurits Acosta, FL – 2024

I remember when I first got the news that I would be one of two Florida delegates to the 62nd Annual USSYP. I was still at school when the call came in and my whole class erupted in cheers. “This is going to change your life” my law teacher said. Little did I know at that time how right she would be. My co-delegate, Brittany Berlin, and I immediately started texting as March 2nd approached. We were both so excited.

Then, Washington Week arrived, and I was meeting the top student leaders from all 50 states. I had done many student leadership programs before, but USSYP was different. I had never been in a room with what truly was the future of our country. Each of the delegates was talented, unique, and so incredibly worthy of being there. Before we knew it, the week had started. I remember the standing ovation we gave our first big speaker, Secretary Pete Buttigieg, when he walked into the room. At that moment it hit me - this week will change my life. Secretary Buttigieg was a USSYP alum and made me realize that those students sitting next to me would one day also be leading our nation’s top institutions.

As the week continued, the high-level access we received to the country’s top government offices never failed to impress me. From our luncheon with the Secretary of State at The Benjamin Franklin State Dining Room to our dinner right next to the Constitution of the United States, USSYP gave me some of the most unique experiences I’ve ever had. My favorite speaker was Senator Bill Cassidy (R-LA) who was humorous yet captivating. I had an opportunity to ask him about his opinion on the filibuster and learn more about how the Senate works. If USSYP taught me anything it’s that all these folks we see on TV and in the news are “regular” people too. Each one of them was welcoming and ready to connect with each one of us at a personal level. I especially felt the personal connection when getting to meet my senator, Rick Scott, and talk to him about his business experience and what inspired him to run for office.

Near the end of the week, we had one particular experience which I will never be able to forget. We got invited to a private watch party of the State of the Union at the White House. I had been in the White House twice before, both times on public morning tours. While those two times were equally amazing and goosebump-inducing, this time was different. It was slightly after 12 AM when the big doors opened and into the East Room stepped the leader of the free world: The President of the United States. There he was, less than 15 feet away from me. After posing with us for some pictures we engaged in conversation with him for over 30 minutes. That’s the magic of the United States Senate Youth Program. Young Americans getting to meet with and speak with some of the most important people in the world.

While the last day of the program was filled with many tears and sad goodbyes, I kept a smile on my face the whole. For me, it was not a “goodbye”, but an “I’ll see you later”. I know I will see all of my co-delegates again one day, whether that be in the Oval Office, the bench of the Supreme Court, or in the halls of the Capitol, our paths will cross again one day.