

Joshua Pak, AK – 2025

To say that Washington Week was the best week of my life would be an understatement.

No amount of eloquent diction, pictures, videos, sheets of frantically scribbled notes, or even nostalgic recollection could capture the effect that it had on me and the trajectory of my future. From the moment I arrived until the moment I left, the Senate Youth Program had me constantly transfixed by something greater than myself, whether that was from walking the coffered “Great Hall” of the Supreme Court building or listening to a speech from the Secretary of State, and it has left an indelible mark on who I am and who I aspire to be.

As I write this reflection in my home across the country in Alaska, I can’t help but notice how, in the same way my home keeps me insulated from the snow falling profusely outside, the distance between my state and D.C. seems to insulate me from the political bustle and important decisions to be made in our nation’s capital. However, by virtue of attending USSYP, this disconnect is rendered null. I still feel a profound connection to the pulse of our nation, the responsibilities of citizenship, and what’s at stake—just as much as I felt it in Washington Week. Every speaker, every tour, and every discussion gave evidence of an intangible force that has moved our country to great heights and is the cause for this clear connection to what I feel. By the end of the Washington Week, I was sure that this intangible force had to be the spirit of service that lies at the heart of our democracy.

The most profound takeaway from my time was the redefining of what public service truly means and looks like in America. It is a definition that is indubitably and regrettably overlooked by the media. I learned that what truly enables our country to not only prosper but also to lead the free world are the actions of public servants that never make headlines. Things that don’t feed the polarization machine. After witnessing it for myself, I truly wish that every American could see for themselves the tireless commitment, servitude, and care of our public servants because they hold the fabric of our government together.

As we approach the 250th anniversary of the independence of our great nation, the quote from Sergeant Major Black rings timely and has affirmed for me a truth that I believe is as alive and relevant as our nation’s history: “If not you, then who? And if not you, don’t complain much.” America’s success in becoming a “more perfect union” in an imperfect world and the longevity of our nation are incumbent on us. However, I do not worry. In the uncertain debate for our future, Washington Week has given me 103 compelling, tenacious, and daring reasons to believe that America is in good hands.

To future delegates of the United States Senate Youth Program,

After having gone through the week myself, I realized that every aspect of the Senate Youth Program had been meticulously designed to show me why politics has mattered, why it matters now, and why it will continue to matter. I believe Senator Klobuchar’s comment captures this sentiment perfectly: “Politics should be about improving people’s lives, not dividing them.” Service before self, people before power, and solutions before problems are among the values that Washington Week has emphasized, and as long as they are upheld, public service will continue to be a “noble and worthy calling,” as stated by Senate Parliamentarian MacDonough.

Future delegates, look beyond the prestige and arrive with a curious attitude, an eager and open mind, and a compassionate soul. Jot everything down, soak every moment, and meet and talk to as many people as you can. Do not miss a second of it because it can and will change your life.

I will be forever grateful for the lessons, friendships, and purpose that the Senate Youth Program has afforded me. It’s given me an experience that has no price but to which I am forever indebted. So, it is my deepest hope that my service—whether military, public, or community service—will be how I pay it forward.