

“What Will You Do With Your One Wild and Precious Life?”

Reflections on Washington Week, United States Senate Youth Program 2025

Earlier this month, I had one of the most inspiring and transformational experiences of my life during the United States Senate Youth Program’s Washington Week. For seven unforgettable days, I had the privilege of joining 103 other student delegates, each a bright light in their communities, for a deep dive into American governance, diplomacy, and public service. From standing on the National Mall to engaging with national leaders and even astronauts, every day challenged me to reflect on what kind of leader I want to be. But among the whirlwind of activity and inspiration, two voices continue to echo in my mind: Ambassador George Moose and Brian Kamoie.

Our evening at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) was a defining moment of the week for me. Over dinner, I had the extraordinary honor of sitting down with Ambassador George Moose, the institute’s president and a lifelong public servant. The conversation we shared was not only meaningful—it was soul-stirring. As we spoke about diplomacy and the mission of peacebuilding, Ambassador Moose shared personal stories from his career, including his tenure as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. He talked about the triumphs and challenges of promoting peace in the most volatile corners of the world and the critical importance of staying grounded in purpose amidst political storms.

After dinner, he guided me through the stunning USIP building, explaining how its flowing architecture, filled with natural light, open spaces, and soaring design, was intentionally built to reflect the values of peace, hope, and transparency. It wasn’t just a federal institution; it was a monument to what diplomacy looks like in physical form. It reminded me that peace is not abstract, it is tangible, deliberate, and often fragile.

That evening, I had the honor of delivering appreciation remarks on behalf of the delegation to Ambassador Moose. I reflected on my home of Pueblo, Colorado, a town steeped in stories of resilience, sacrifice, and community, and expressed how meaningful it was to celebrate a fellow Coloradan who has made an impact on the global stage. Ambassador Moose and I both believe in showing up for the people we serve.

What inspired me most about Ambassador Moose wasn’t just his resume; it was his presence. He listened. He shared. He mentored. And in doing so, he reminded me that real leadership is as much about humility as it is about strength. That night reaffirmed my belief that peace is worth fighting for, and that diplomacy, while often quiet, has the power to transform the world.

Earlier in the week, we heard from Brian Kamoie, a 1989 USSYP alum and now Managing Director of Cyber and Strategic Risk at Deloitte. His story was remarkable in its own right, a career spanning emergency preparedness, homeland security, and national resilience. But it was a single quote that struck me like lightning: “What will you do with your one wild and precious life?” A quote originally penned by poet Mary Oliver, it took on new weight as Kamoie looked out at all of us --future senators, teachers, diplomats, organizers-- and challenged us to make it count.

That question has stayed with me every day since. It’s become a compass in my thinking about the future. Because ultimately, this one wild and precious life isn’t just about ambition, it’s about intention. What will I build? Who will I serve? How will I use my voice, my education, my opportunities, to help others live freer, safer, more fulfilling lives?

Kamoie’s message reminded me that the path to public service is not always linear. It requires courage, flexibility, and a constant return to one’s “why.” And as someone preparing to study political science at The George Washington University, I left his talk feeling energized, ready to embrace the challenges ahead with a renewed sense of purpose.

Yet, Washington Week wasn’t just impactful because of the speakers. It was the people sitting beside me at every table, laughing (and singing) on every coach ride, and supporting each other during every late-night reflection. In just one week, I formed friendships that will last a lifetime. I met students who will be attending GWU with me this fall, as well as others going to nearby schools. Knowing I’ll step into this next chapter surrounded by peers who share my drive for service is both comforting and exciting. We’re already planning coffee shop meetups and service projects—and I know these relationships will anchor me as I navigate college and beyond.

Among the most meaningful connections I made were with my Military Mentor group, affectionately named “The Beanstalks.” The guidance, laughter, and quiet support of all of the mentors were unmatched. They reminded us that strength and service go hand in hand with compassion and curiosity. Within that group, I found a second family—and I’ll always be grateful to them for creating a space where we could be vulnerable, dream big, and lift each other up. My roommate, Martin, quickly became one of my closest confidants. Our daily conversations, shared jokes, and thoughtful reflections were among the most grounding parts of my week. To know someone so genuine and committed to service gave me hope for the future of our generation.

One of the most surreal moments came when we met the astronauts from the Crew 71 Expedition. Hearing from individuals who had literally left Earth and seen our planet from space was humbling. They spoke about the fragility of our environment and the need for global cooperation like no one else could. They didn’t just talk about space; they reminded us of our shared humanity. Their words echoed the broader themes of the week: peace, collaboration, and the awe-inspiring possibilities of what we can achieve together.

Though some of our Thursday schedule changed, in just a few hours, I walked away from that day just as inspired. One of the most valuable lessons from the entire experience was that leadership isn’t about perfect plans, it’s about adaptability, grace, and knowing when to listen. Even in the moments that didn’t unfold as expected, we found meaning, shared stories, and made memories that will stay with us forever.

Now, as I return home to Colorado and look ahead to the next phase of my journey, I carry with me a heart full of gratitude and a mind brimming with ideas. I carry Ambassador Moose’s legacy of peace, Brian Kamoie’s challenge to live purposefully, the laughter of my new friends, and the steady support of my mentors.

And above all else, I carry the question that will shape the rest of my life:

“What will I do with my one wild and precious life?”

I don’t have all the answers yet. But thanks to Washington Week, I’m more ready than ever to begin.