

Wilson Chau, HI – 2025

Dear USSYP 'Ohana,

When I was first added to our USSYP group chat, I didn't expect my heart to feel this full months later. Back then, we were just names on a screen, exchanging light banter, debating the itinerary dress code, and trying to outwit each other in "two truths and a lie." What started as playful introductions became the early signs of something deeper—something I'd later come to recognize as family.

Growing up in Hawai'i, I was raised with the value of aloha. Not the kind you hear in passing or see printed on t-shirts, but the quiet kind. The kind that means selfless giving, deep empathy, and treating everyone like a loved one. Back home, aloha is the thread that weaves through every meal shared, every hug exchanged, every act of kindness without expectation. But traveling beyond the islands, it's not something I've always found easily.

With all of you, I never had to look far.

Despite coming from every corner of the country, from redwood forests to desert skies, from big cities to rural roads, we were united by something rare. A commitment to serve. A yearning to lead. A belief that our voices could bring light to the communities we call home. From the moment we gathered in the halls of the Mayflower Hotel, I felt something shift. The tension of travel faded. We found comfort in one another, like old friends somehow meeting for the first time.

We spent the week in the heart of our nation, standing before history, learning from the leaders shaping our future. We traced the words of our founding documents. We walked the steps of the Capitol. We listened intently as senators and secretaries, judges and justices spoke directly to us—not as kids, but as the next generation of decision-makers. Not many people our age get to carry those moments home. I hope we never take them for granted.

One of the most powerful experiences for me was meeting the alumni. As we walked into that Grand Ballroom, we were welcomed by people who had once stood in our shoes. Some came from decades past, but their stories didn't feel distant. They were generous with their time, their wisdom, and their friendship. A few even offered to be future college roommates. That kind of warmth, that desire to return and uplift the next wave of leaders, is something you don't forget. USSYP doesn't just give you a week—it provides a lifelong network of encouragement, support, and shared purpose.

This program gave me more than just inspiration—it gave me direction. I found purpose in our conversations, in the dreams we exchanged over breakfast and late-night chats. I found belonging in your stories, your struggles, your triumphs. You reminded me why I want to do more, be more, and give more for the people around me. Each of you, in your own way, helped light a spark in me that I'll carry forward.

I still remember our last day like it was yesterday. The tears, the tight hugs, the promises whispered between packed bags and tearful smiles. There was pain in saying goodbye, but also peace in knowing this wasn't the end. This is just the beginning.

Thank you for giving me a home away from home. For making aloha feel alive across state lines. For becoming my family. This isn't the end.

Until we meet again,
Wilson Chau