

Maneet Mehta, MD – 2025

On a crisp March morning in the Benjamin Franklin State Dining Room, I learned that public service isn't about what you gain—but what you give. Surrounded by gold crests, the United States seal emblazoned on the ceiling, and 103 fellow delegates just as curious (and hungry) as I was, I realized we had stepped into more than a grand room. We had stepped into a grand calling. In particular, I learned three lessons.

1) Public Service Requires Sacrifice

March 4, 2025. As our group piled into the Department of State, Secretary of State Marco Rubio delivered a message that resonated profoundly: *service before all else*. He reminded us that billionaires on their deathbeds don't wish for more zeroes in their bank accounts; they wish they had left a more meaningful mark on the world. His words challenged me—someone already debating which career path to pursue—by suggesting that real success follows genuine service. It's not about personal gain or prestige; it's about the impact you have on others. If I'm willing to sacrifice some comfort or compensation for a greater good, I'm already on the path to success.

2) Public Service Transcends Partisanship

I'm a Democrat through and through, and I've never hesitated to express my political views. Yet, when I listened to Justice Kavanaugh speak, I found myself gaining a new respect for his perspective—even if we diverge on many issues. He urged us to stand in another's shoes, to consider intentions, and to extend empathy before drawing conclusions. This resonated beyond the Supreme Court's chambers. It reminded me that much of public life—and perhaps, real progress—hinges on our ability to see each other as people first, not just ideologues. Even if we maintain our values and votes, we can still find common ground in shared passion for service.

3) Public Service Goes Beyond Policymaking

Our sessions with NASA astronauts, with Mr. Ryan Nobles from NBC, with Ms. Linda Roth of the World Central Kitchen, and with the USIP underscored a surprising truth: public service isn't confined to legislation or government offices. Working in a NASA lab can mean pioneering research that touches countless lives. Reporting the news with integrity promotes transparency and safeguards democracy. As the Washington Post famously says, *"Democracy Dies in Darkness."* In each of these fields, service to the public—through science, information, or humanitarian aid—illuminates paths to a better future.

Leaving USSYP, I'm still unsure about which specific career or role I'll pursue. But I am certain of one thing: whatever path I choose, it will align with these three lessons. I will make sacrifices when duty demands, see beyond partisan labels, and recognize that service is a calling that can flourish in any domain—from a code editor to a newsroom, from a legislative chamber to a research lab. Because ultimately, public service is about finding ways—big or small—to uplift others. And that's a lesson I'll carry with me long after the Benjamin Franklin State Dining Room fades into memory.

P.S Shoutout to my Griffith Gladiators, to whom I'll be forever inspired by.