

## Nyla Dinkins, DC – 2026

There are no squirrels in Hawaii. West Virginia lies somewhere between farmlands and a song everyone seems to know by heart. And in South Korea, much like America, trench coats represent the intersection of fashion and business.

I have often wondered how much you can learn about the place you have lived your whole life. When surrounded by five strangers from around the world, the answer is clear: education is endless.

As a delegate representing the Dynamic District of Washington, D.C., I thought I was my city's expert. I had grown up in its museums, walked past its monuments daily, and watched history unfold outside my very doorstep. However, it wasn't until I saw my city through the people who had crossed oceans, mountains, and state lines to visit that I realized there was much more for me to experience.

At the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP), my Military Mentor group became my community and newfound family. We arrived with a collection of stories and left lifelong learners and experts of American history. An unforgettable and some would say *historic* exchange.

It would be an understatement to say that I learned a lot because what I gained at USSYP was far greater than knowledge alone. Through my participation in the program, I joined a community, made life-long memories, and formed a forever family. I was challenged in thought and propelled by belief. I was supported heavily and guided gracefully, all alongside the 103 other dedicated and devoted delegates who I had the pleasure of meeting.

Truthfully, I haven't stopped talking about it. I replay the moments in my head, bring them up in every conversation, and find myself almost waiting for someone to ask so I can share them again. Though at times, I do not wait for an invitation to prompt me because the beauty of USSYP excites me daily.

At USSYP, I created memories I will never forget: exchanging jokes with Senator Cory Booker, sneezing and being blessed by Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson (a sentence I never thought I would form), and having the honor of introducing Mark Shriver: a true champion of change.

To represent my city in my hometown was the honor of my lifetime. To be a part-time tour guide and a full-time learner is an experience I do not take lightly. To walk into rooms I've grown up near, but with a seat at the table, it is a memory I will forever value.

I learned to see the beauty beyond my backyard, and I explored places that, although they were right within my District, were beyond my wildest dreams.

"Delegates and Distinguished Guests" is no longer a phrase; it is the heightened standard I hold myself to.

It will always remind me of a space I felt heard in, and a room I felt welcomed in. It is a phrase I will always be proud to have heard.