

Makenna Monroe, MT – 2026

The Week That Showed Me Hope

"I started by telling you that you belong here, because I felt like I didn't. And the biggest lesson I learned here was that I did." - Brian Kamoie.

As I reflect upon this week, it is Brian Kamoie's words that echo in my head even weeks later. It was an honor to be selected as Montana's delegate to the 64th annual United States Senate Youth Program- but at first I wasn't sure if It was an honor I deserved.

In the end, this week taught me many things. As I sat at tables in rooms I'd never dared to even dream of, I learned the value of listening and the power of connection. From our Distinguished Guests I learned that behind each position there are people, people who hold dreams and flaws. Hearing from Supreme Court Justice Jackson and journalist Rachel Scott showed me the power of dedication and passion, while Charles Bolden and the Ambassador of Thailand shared the power of unity and diplomacy. I learned from Senators on both sides of the aisle, and found that friendship can be a powerful tool. And each and every one of these speakers were humble, diligent, and simply astounding in their dedication to bettering our world.

And by far the largest lesson I learned from everyone - Distinguished Guests, Military Mentors, and my fellow delegates; was the power of humility and kindness. It was there with the Military Mentors who gave up time with their family to support us, it was there when my wonderful co-delegate Cecelia shared her stories of connection while explaining how to cook a stir fry, and it was there when Charlisa gave up a seat at her very own table, switching spots with me in one of the most true acts of kindness I have ever seen, so that I could live my dream for a minute.

USSYP changed my life - but even more importantly than that, it showed me hope for a brighter future in a world that faces increasing pressure. Hope that resides within the hearts of caffeine addicted teenagers. These teenagers who played card games late into the night, laughing and connecting but awoke each day ready to lead, discuss, challenge, and solve our nation's problems. My 104 co-delegates inspired me, challenged me, shaped me, and showed me that there is value to each and every voice, and that perhaps it is the voices most overlooked that should speak the loudest.

So now there is hope - but there is also a sense of obligation. I know that the Alumni of the 64th Annual United States Senate Youth Program will change the world, and we know that subsequently the weight of the world rests upon our shoulders. We were chosen for this program because each one of us has a spark to fulfill something greater, a notion that perhaps it is our very own voices that will shape the nation as we dedicate our lives to public service.

They said this week would change us. And it did. To every soul who helped make this dream a reality, to my lovely mentor group, thank you. I know the future of our nation is bright - because I have seen it. It rests in the hearts of students from across the nation, rests in the small acts of kindness that shape our world.

To answer Brian Kamoie's final question, I do not yet know what I will do with my one wild and precious life, but I know that I will continue to dedicate myself to a career in public service, carrying with me the numerous lessons I learned through USSYP.