

Chloe Bowers, SD – 2026

When I was first made aware of my selection for the 64th United States Senate Youth Program, I was told how much of an honor it was and how proud I should be of myself. Instead, I felt incredibly underqualified while looking at the itinerary for the Washington Week. Though this has been a dream since I was first told about the program, I was scared about how I would size up to the other delegates. After landing in D.C. on my incredibly late flight and meeting my roommate, I then knew that these would be the type of people I would strive to surround myself with for the rest of my life.

Every time I heard the words “Delegates and Distinguished Guests,” I felt a shock of awareness—of who I was surrounded by and how lucky I was to listen to them. The address was repeated at every meal, but it never lost its meaning. Whether we were in the Mayflower Ballroom, the Senate buildings, the State Department, or the Pentagon, the real spectacle was always the people in the room.

During one of our first Q&A sessions with Senator Katie Britt, I realized how curious and determined my fellow delegates were. It was immediately clear that this group would be asking tough, thoughtful questions to every speaker we met. While watching the pens fly to paper after each response, I could only imagine how filled with knowledge and insight those notebooks would be by the end of the week. After that session, we turned those questions into group projects, tailoring them to each speaker and department. The depth of our questions showed how much everyone cared. Many speakers seemed surprised by how specific and policy-driven our inquiries were, but they always met us with honesty and depth. Those exchanges were some of the best moments of the week. I was particularly interested in how Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dan Cain was able to answer questions both precisely and simply. Every speaker had a unique approach to responding that truly humanized those who govern America.

Even with our wide range of political beliefs, one theme ran through nearly every conversation: “There’s no single path to get where I am today.” Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson said it best, emphasizing passion and persistence over any set formula for success. The Military Mentors gave a unique and extremely necessary look into a career path where service is paramount, and I am endlessly grateful for their presence. As I grew closer to my fellow delegates, I saw that truth reflected in them. None of us were on the same path—some were headed toward medicine, others space exploration, public policy, or agriculture—but all shared the same drive to help shape America’s future.

The United States Senate Youth Program is a rare space where young leaders can dive straight into the issues we’ll one day inherit. As Charles Baldin reminded us, “You have to make many little failures before you can succeed.” And the stickers on our dinner plates at the NASA Museum echoed that same idea: “Failure is not an option.” After meeting the members of the 64th delegation—their dedication, focus, and heart—I left believing without a doubt that the future of this country is in capable hands.