

Kyle-David Byrne, VA – 2019

I still remember the day - Friday, December 7, 2018, as though it was yesterday. I approached the front of my house and saw a UPS packet sitting on my doorstep. I slowly picked it up, read the sender's name on the label, and immediately felt a surge of anticipation and excitement. I wondered what could be inside. I ran into my house and quickly opened the packet with a trembling hand. What I found inside would change my life forever. I had been selected as a delegate for the 2019 United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) representing the great Commonwealth of Virginia.

The week in Washington, D.C., March 2nd through 9th, will live forever in my fondest memories. Never before had I been involved in a program attended by such highly intelligent and engaged community leaders from all over the country. I enjoyed sitting down and having detailed conversations with many of my fellow participants about various topics and learning their honest thoughts about it. I remember a particular conversation with a fellow delegate from Hawaii regarding education and public schooling. In our discussion, she eloquently raised facts and policy alternatives that I had never previously considered. Though I had visited Hawaii several times as a tourist, I had never seen the state through the eyes of someone who had lived there their entire life. The broadening of my perspectives on many issues through my experiences at USSYP will remain with me forever.

Participants were privileged to hear from distinguished speakers and meet influential governmental figures from all branches and sectors of the government. My favorite event was meeting the president of the United States in the White House. I had seen him on television, heard him speak over the radio, read his tweets on Twitter, and seen his ubiquitous slogan "Make America Great Again." However, you really cannot appreciate someone and understand what they represent until you see them in person and get to shake their hand. That is the effect President Donald J. Trump had on me. As I saw him walking down the corridor towards the East Room in the White House, I could actually sense the incredible power and immense responsibility he carried as president of the United States. As I shook his hand, I was able to achieve one of my huge goals of meeting the president. As President Trump was leaving the room and it was getting quiet, I garnered the courage to strongly utter four words - "Make America Great Again!" What happened next, I could not believe. The President of the United States Donald Trump, turned around, faced and pointed directly at me, and began to clap. He clapped for me and the motto which had won him the presidency of the United States. In a state of shock, all I could think to do was clap along with the president and the entire USSYP group. With four words, I had made the president of the United States, the leader of the free world, turn around and clap for me. Another memory I will never forget for the rest of my life.

Hearing and learning not only from the president, but also from the secretary of State, the secretary of Housing and Urban Development, multiple senators, as well as the chief justice of the United States Supreme Court is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. This program singlehandedly affirmed my career path of public service and broadened my views on every branch of the most powerful government in the world. Each person serving in government is an essential cog ensuring our country's continued freedom. I now welcome my future and sworn duty to protect and serve the people of this country by defending and upholding the principles of the United States Constitution. I strongly recommend the United States Senate Youth Program for others considering a government career in service to the American people.