

## **Layne Donovan, WI – 2019**

### **My Senate Youth Program Experience**

When I stepped on a plane destined for Washington, D.C. I didn't know what to expect. To me then, the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) was simply an opportunity to make friends, learn a little more about our government and leave with a scholarship. When I landed in Washington, D.C. I found that and so much more.

I was initially welcomed in The Mayflower Hotel by 103 other students, eager to converse with each other about everything about the 2020 election to our favorite fast food restaurant. They spent the first few hours of the week in a frenzy, running around the Grand Ballroom shaking as many hands as possible. At one point I was stopped by my Military Mentor. I can still remember her kind smile as I introduced myself. I was particularly impressed with how much she already knew about me. We discussed my hometown, my family and my high school. I walked away from our initial conversation excited, impressed and above all feeling welcomed.

The week that followed changed me forever. Within just a few days, I formed lasting bonds with my fellow delegates through a series of shared experiences. I scribbled meticulous notes in my little navy USSYP journal. When I look back at these notes now I still remember how it felt to be in the same room as some of the most influential people in the government. I can still recall their stories and their words of wisdom. For a young woman who dreams of working in politics each of these experiences felt me feeling enlightened.

The value of my Senate Youth Program experience goes far beyond what is written in the pages of my journal. What cannot be expressed in a word are the things that I learned from my fellow delegates.

There are some things you can only learn by meeting people who come from different backgrounds. I was extremely impressed by the diversity of the delegates. Such diversity in the background made conversations with my fellow delegates fascinating. This level of diversity does not exist where I live.

United States Senate Youth Program combined three unique opportunities together. The opportunity to meet other passionate youth from diverse backgrounds, learn about the way the three branches of government interact from some of the most influential people in the United States government, and to spend a week touring some of the powerful places in Washington, D.C. I came home from the United States Senate Youth Program changed for the better, filled with new knowledge and connected with lifelong friends, and for that I am forever grateful.