

David Smith, VA - 2021

My experience in the 59th annual United States Senate Youth Program has been a very pivotal moment in my life. At a young age I always knew that I wanted to serve the people and be a voice for underrepresented communities. This program has given great purpose and direction to my aspirations, and I am forever thankful for this opportunity. The relationships I've formed and memories I have, will be taken with me through my entire life.

Out of all of the terrific activities provided throughout Washington Week, my favorite was getting to hear from our distinguished guest speakers. It was such a privilege to hear from such notable people who are in positions many of us aspire to be in in the future. All gave great insight into their respective fields and had powerful messages, but a select few stood out to me the most. Starting with NASA Astronaut Captain Scott Kelly, his friendly demeanor and personable responses made for a great opening to the program. Hearing his story about his performance in school and how that correlated to his many accomplishments was really inspiring. Also, hearing from Senator's Lankford and Baldwin was very enticing. It was great to hear Senator Lankford's viewpoints even though he is on the opposing side of the political spectrum that I am on. Both he and Senator Baldwin spoke in depth on how they are using their platform to push forward their agendas. Senator Baldwin holds many titles as the first in her field. It was such a blessing to write down quotes from her and be given words of encouragement to minorities going into spaces where they might be the first.

There were many other great speakers that I really took a liking to. Individuals such as Norah O'Donnell, Brian Kamoie, Gina McCarthy, and Noah Harris gave very powerful answers to our questions and I scribed many quotes that I can apply to my everyday life. Out of all of the guests that interacted with us during Washington Week, the two that were most impactful to me were Noah Harris and my Military Mentor, Major Boston McClain.

Growing up in an area where many of my peers are uninterested in politics makes experiences like this have great value in my life. To be included among many of the brightest high school students in the United States is truly an honor. My fellow delegates motivate me to strive for greatness, and not give up on my career and life goals. I will cherish the memories I had during Washington week for my entire life. The relationships, the information, and overall experience was exceptional. In the words of Mr. Steve Cox, "[I can finally say that], I have a couch to sleep on in all 50 states."