

Sneha Revanur, CA – 2022

When State Superintendent Tony Thurmond first notified me of my selection as one of California's two delegates to the 60th annual United States Senate Youth Program, I had only an inkling of what awaited me: a generous undergraduate scholarship, an invitation to a week-long educational program, and a meeting with my U.S. senators. As I reflect on the experience four months later, I recognize that it has endowed me with something far more valuable: a renewed desire to enter public service and positively shape the future of this country.

Over the course of Washington Week, I had the distinct honor of delivering appreciation remarks for retired U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, discussing pressing challenges in tech policy with U.S. Senator Chris Coons, and hearing from leaders like U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg. Washington Week brought distant news headlines to life by allowing my fellow delegates and I to engage intimately with the national and international leaders on the front lines. I never would've imagined that we'd receive a master class on the nuts and bolts of the Constitution from Justice Kennedy, who facilitated an open forum diving into the document's key structural elements, or learn more about the ongoing invasion of Ukraine from U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield.

Another speaker I found particularly inspiring was United States Associate Attorney General Vanita Gupta, who spoke to us about her experiences learning to build relationships with police unions while championing police reform herself. Reaching out to stakeholders on the opposite side of an issue, she shared, is an imperative, especially in a time of harrowing polarization. I found myself energized by the convictions that each speaker brought to their long and storied careers in public service; ever since the conclusion of Washington Week, I've let my mind wander as I imagine the many ways in which I might influence the realms of politics and public policy myself.

Perhaps the most meaningful gift that the United States Senate Youth Program has lent me, however, is an everlasting network of peers devoted to leadership and civic engagement. It was an honor to learn more about my fellow delegates' contributions to their communities and to expose myself to competing perspectives as we embarked on late-night discussions grappling with hot-button political issues. Though we didn't always agree, I admired our ability to engage in respectful dialogue, and I developed a newfound appreciation for the varying social, cultural, political, and geographic contexts that shape our policy views. I'm confident that these friendships will stand the test of time, especially as many of us follow similar paths into public service.

My experience as a delegate to the United States Senate Youth Program has been transformative. I've emerged with an even deeper commitment to compassionate leadership and an unwavering belief in the vital importance of civil discourse. As I approach the future, I'm sure that I'll frequently revisit my time as a delegate in search of clarity and inspiration.