

## Joshua Donophan, DE – 2023

The 61<sup>st</sup> annual United States Senate Youth Program was one of the greatest epochs of my entire life. Any amount of praise in the form of writing will simply not do this program the rightful justice that it so rightfully deserves. From speaking with valuable members of our federal government, to speaking with our respectful and thoughtful Senators, to even speaking to Associate Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, Washington Week encompassed all that it is to be an American in our current political system.

I grossly underestimated how powerful this program was to me in terms of building connections, friendships, my career, and my understanding of life in the United States as I knew it, and allowed me to finally see firsthand these different perspectives that I have only previously heard about in textbooks or the internet. I had initially laughed it off when those around me prior to the event said it would be one of a kind, but in retrospect, not only is it one of a kind; it is once in a *lifetime*.

To list my favorite speakers and events bluntly, the first speaker and event that I deeply enjoyed was the ability to be upfront with Justice Sotomayor as a collective and the ability to actually sit in the Supreme Court and hear her wisdom firsthand. Additionally, I was able to finally get my burning questions answered from one my state Senators, Chris Coons. For the record, I asked my biggest burning question to him, and it is official; he loves the McRib sandwich from McDonalds.

Furthermore, I also loved the environment of the United States Institute of Peace, and it ironically made me feel at peace just having the ability to have our luncheon there and relax briefly and hear from some great speakers there as well. Also, Senator John Hickenlooper's speech for us was in equal parts enlightening as it was hilarious. Definitely the kind of person I would love to be around, and definitely the kind of person I appreciate making the most informed decisions for our country as a whole. I especially enjoyed giving him and my fellow delegates a good chuckle when asking him about his role in the movie "Casino Jack." Needless to say, he brought back an even funnier response for myself as well as everyone else, and it was great to hear from my favorite hit actor from "Casino Jack."

Lastly, but most significantly, the bonds and experiences that I made and was able to share with my fellow delegates are simply irreplaceable, and something that I will never be able to repay to The Hearst Foundations. Through the absolute *privilege* of being selected as one of two delegates to represent my home state of Delaware, I was able to cultivate some of the best and enduring friendships that I will not soon forget. Therefore, I no longer want to call these individuals my fellow *delegates*, but rather my *friends*. I look forward to always staying in touch with all of the friends that I have made through this once-in-a-lifetime, one-of-a-kind program, and I thank everyone that worked behind the scenes to make this amazing event of Washington Week possible. I am eternally grateful for all of you. I have no doubt that this experience has and will continue to help my positive development as a human being as well as my future career aspirations, and I have no doubt that I will be able to help my fellow friends through their lives and careers as needed as well. As I always like to say, "It's all love. Peace."

Wishing Everyone All the Best.