

Maverick Yasuda, HI – 2023

I am not just a kid from Hawaii, but so much more. In my eyes, as well as the eyes of 103 of my fellow delegates, the United States Senate Youth Program is not just a once in a lifetime experience, but so much more. Avoiding the complacency of the word “just” and embracing the compelling possibilities of the term “and,” is what makes this program so great.

From casually speaking with Supreme Court Associate Justice Sonia Sotomayor to being briefed about the academic progress that students are making nationally from the U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona, I feel truly grateful to have been able to hear from so many inspiring and experienced national leaders that come from very different backgrounds. I particularly enjoyed the time spent with the humorous and knowledgeable Colorado Senator John Hickenlooper, who encouraged the delegates that “rather than being a powerful wave that pushes around others, be a rising tide that simultaneously uplifts all those around you.” I am confident that these words truly epitomized the cohort of student delegates at the 61st annual United States Senate Youth Program, as it brought together some of the most eclectic group of talented young leaders.

One of the most invaluable aspects of my experience during the program was the time allocated to spend with my Military Mentor group, the “One Stars,” and my roommate and lifelong friend, Stanley Stoutamire. Coming from someone who spent the majority of their life on an island, meeting 103 other dynamic and outgoing individuals can be quite tiring and overwhelming at times. However, I always felt a sense of relief and joy when I had the chance to catch up with my group in the early mornings and late nights of Washington Week.

This experience being my first time in Washington, D.C, I wouldn’t trade it for the world. To put it briefly, this program opened my eyes to the realization I am not alone on my journey of working to create a better tomorrow. In closing, I would like to share a quote from Supreme Court Associate Justice Sonia Sotomayor. Her exact words were, “Don’t be a bystander; you either get on board the bus, or you get hit by the bus.” While getting on board the bus is cool, I intend on driving my own bus, doing my part to steer my community, state, and nation to a brighter tomorrow.