

Jayden Speed, NE – 2023

I arrived at the 61st Annual United States Senate Youth Program late on the night of March 4th and though tired from my travels I was greeted by wonderful people that I would get to know over the course of the week. My Military Mentor and roommate made me feel at home right away and helped prepare me for the day ahead. Each day at Washington Week was a new facet of the same foundational theme: public service.

Program Director Rayne Guilford made a comment that this was “the Olympics of public service” and that comment has stuck with me. It has in part due to my personal call to and passion for public service. My interest in our nation’s politics and government stem from my life experiences and the experiences of my family. I entered this field because I wanted to serve people who had similar experiences. Washington Week not only reinforced the value of public service, but also showed the many paths that one can take.

Our speakers, no matter their title or field of work, shared a core devotion to their work and to the nation. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor spoke to us in a way that really made all feel heard and offered her advice. She spoke about the need for everyone to be involved. She decried bystanders who simply stand in the street as a bus is barreling forward. Her advice to us: “Don’t be a bystander. Don’t get hit by the bus.” Delegates also heard about the importance of our democratic institutions and the people who fight for them every day. From the Archivist of the United States to the Senate Parliamentarian, it is often the unknown civil servants that are at the forefront of keeping our Republic alive.

The delegates and Military Mentors were as inspiring as the civil servants we met. Somehow and in some way 104 students from around the country, from different ideological beliefs, and different backgrounds found a way to be collegial, to work together, and to openly tackle the issues of our time. Unfortunately, some officials in the United States have largely failed to do just that. The 17 Military Mentors also opened up my eyes to the real service that our Armed Forces provide despite the partisanship that surrounds most discussions of national security. These men and women, top of their fields, dedicate their lives to service to their nation.

In essence, there is no one I would rather spend a week with than the delegates, staff, and Military Mentors of the United States Senate Youth Program. Our nation is in good hands with individuals like these dedicated to its service.