

Matthew Stevens, NY – 2023

The 2023 United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) was one of the most incredible experiences of my life. From the many new friends I made to the invaluable knowledge gained, to the overall once-in-a-lifetime opportunities, it was an experience I will never forget. The program allowed me to immerse myself in learning in a truly unique setting where I was able to hear some of the most important lessons in leadership in the home of our nation's government. When asked about what it was like, I always say the same thing, "It is like a spiritual revival for a life of public service and a passion for government."

USSYP provided the opportunity to meet and converse with a diverse group of like-minded people. I think we all learned a lesson about the state of our nation. We have many flaws, and we disagree a lot about a lot. But, the state of our nation is strong because the values that we serve under, which are summarized as "an idea called America," are flawless and uncontroversial. The idea of self-government, and unalienable rights such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness... these ideas we all agree on. The only conflict we have is determining how we achieve that. Throughout the week, we heard from officials on both sides of the aisle, each of whom shared lessons with a bit of their perspective thrown in. So while each side may have a different plan and it conflicts with the other side, the dream of bipartisanship is mutual. The fire of bipartisanship is still alive, but much like a literal fire, it requires support. We must all agree to come to the table and consider all perspectives in order to create the strongest solutions.

During Washington Week, I was able to meet and interact with some of our nation's top leaders and public servants. One of the speakers who left a lasting impression on me was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley. His message of service above self, and sacrifice for others truly resonated with me. General Milley reminded us that sometimes life will throw you a curveball, something that you didn't sign up for, and that sometimes you have to take the punches and remind yourself why you're there.

Overall, the USSYP has been a life-changing experience that has opened doors for me and helped me to grow as an individual. It has shown me that there are many paths to success and it has restored my confidence in our government. I am grateful for the opportunity to have participated in the United States Senate Youth Program and will always cherish the memories and lessons learned. Washington Week showed me that there are many different ways to make a positive impact on the world, as evident by our diverse set of speakers.

I am confident that the skills and knowledge I gained during the program will serve me well in the future. I was inspired by seeing so many young people who are passionate about making a difference in the world. It serves as a reminder that there is strength in diversity and that we can accomplish great things when we work together. I am grateful for the chance to have participated in such a prestigious program and for the many lessons that I learned along the way. I believe I'm now ready to start the next chapter in my life in public service and I owe it all to the United States Senate Youth Program.