

## **Kshiraj Talati, SC – 2023**

“Welcome esteemed delegates, to the 61<sup>st</sup> annual United States Senate Youth Program,” echoes in my mind, bringing back memories of an unforgettable experience that ignited a deep passion for politics within me. As a delegate from South Carolina, I had the privilege of meeting some of the most influential people in American politics, the brightest young minds in the world, and being able to work with an incredible staff of Military Mentors who left a profound impact on me.

Captain Puntoriero, a decorated U.S. soldier with a diverse background in service and my Military Mentor, taught us the importance of integrity, discipline, and teamwork. As President John F. Kennedy once said, "Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other." Captain Puntoriero's unwavering commitment to excellence and leadership skills inspired us to strive for greatness.

During the program, we had the privilege of hearing from U.S. senators and government officials who shared their insights and experiences with us. Their dedication to serving the country was palpable and inspiring. I was particularly moved by the words of Dr. Vivek Murthy, the Surgeon General of the United States, whose commitment to public health and well-being has always been my inspiration. In his words "the future of our nation is in the continued good health of the people." Hearing him speak about his vision for the future reminded me of the importance of investing in knowledge and working towards a better tomorrow.

Our visits to iconic landmarks in Washington, D.C., like the Pentagon, White House, Senate Buildings, and Congress, were awe-inspiring. These structures, built on the foundations of democracy, represented the power of determination and hard work. The Mayflower Hotel, where the program was held, was a tangible representation of this sentiment and a subconscious reminder to pursue our dreams with vigor.

The \$10,000 scholarship provided by the program was a blessing that will help me pursue my dreams and make a positive impact in the world. As Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of true education." This scholarship has given me the opportunity to receive true education and to use my intelligence and character to make a positive difference in the world.

From the day we walked in, to meeting all my delegates and my best friends, to the incredible experiences we had, whether it be getting a quick workout in at the gym with Northeastern's star point guard, to hearing Mr. Cox's dialogue, to running the Farewell Night keynote speaker elections, to nightly Military Mentor meetings, to enjoying the finest dining, to drinking more San Pelligrinos than glasses of water daily, to concreting permanent bonds with my delegates on that final night, I'll never forget the experiences this program has given me.

In conclusion, the United States Senate Youth Program has been a life-changing experience that has sparked a deep passion for politics within me. It has taught me invaluable lessons about leadership, responsibility, and the power of teamwork. Working with an incredible staff of Military Mentors left a profound impact on me and inspired me to be the best version of myself. I hope to use the knowledge and experience gained during this program to honor the sacrifices of those who serve our country and make a positive impact on the world. I aspire to embody former president JFK's quote: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." And perhaps that statement means the most.