

## **Maxwell Lightfield, SD – 2023**

Attending the United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP) was an unforgettable experience. As one of the delegates from South Dakota, I was excited to meet other leaders from across the country and learn about our nation's government and political system. Little did I know that the program would exceed every single one of my expectations and leave a lasting impact on my life. From getting to ride in a motor coach bus for the first time to meeting senior leaders in our government, the experience was nothing short of spectacular.

One of my favorite parts of the program was getting the opportunity to visit many buildings that I had never been to before. Particularly, the National Archives was one that I connected with. Having the opportunity to eat just fifty feet away from the Constitution is a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Another highlight of the program was the impressive roster of speakers that we had. Ranging from Senator John Hickenlooper to General Mark Milley, we heard from a wide range of individuals who shared their insights and experiences on leadership and politics. My personal favorite speaker was Associate Justice Sonia Sotomayor, who was incredibly personable and well-spoken. Her presence was captivating, and she spoke with a level of warmth and authenticity that made her feel personable despite her high profile. I found myself hanging on to every word she said. Her personal anecdotes and stories from her upbringing and career path were not only inspiring but also relatable.

Beyond the incredible speakers the program offered, what I enjoyed most about the program was the opportunity to meet and interact with so many brilliant and impressive people who were my age. It was incredible to be surrounded by such a talented and motivated group of young leaders, all with unique stories and experiences. I found it fascinating to learn about the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the other attendees and how they were working towards their own goals and dreams. The conversations and friendships that I formed during the program will stay with me for years to come, and I feel incredibly grateful to have been a part of such a supportive and inspiring community.

In conclusion, my time at USSYP was a truly transformative experience. I must thank The Hearst Foundations for providing such a unique and amazing opportunity to so many rising leaders. I also must thank the Military Mentors that made the program flow so well, the Mayflower's hotel staff for providing us meals everyday, and the bus drivers for hauling us around D.C.