

Brittany Berlin, FL – 2024

Surrounded by a plethora of tourists and D.C. locals alike, my life was rapidly transformed in the seemingly mundane baggage claim at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. In a mere five-minute time span, I was shaking hands with Military Mentors, greeting my co-delegate, Maurits Acosta, and creating bonds with emerging leaders from all walks of life. Prior to even acclimating to my surroundings, I was whisked away to the Mayflower Hotel for the most profound and impactful week of my life.

Our very first dinner in the Grand Ballroom was one of unison. Taking our seats promptly at 4 p.m. we were welcomed by Taylor Oster and Tuqa Alibadi, two USSYP alumni who quickly united us all through the shared bond of this unique program. Moreover, their recollections and-at times- humorous memories garnered from the U.S. Senate Youth Program allowed the 62nd cohort to truly grasp the importance of the upcoming week. These speakers were predecessors to Bill Doherty, the co-founder of Braver Angels, an organization aiming to depolarize the American political system. His thoughtful commentary allowed us to form bonds over the following meal of tacos - one of the best dinners we shared while in Washington.

With every passing day, we grew closer through our “once-in-a-lifetime” experiences. Monday was filled with excitement over meeting Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan, who provided a unique perspective on the judiciary. Tuesday, we enjoyed lunch in the State Department with speaker Antony Blinken, who engaged with us about current geopolitical affairs. On Wednesday, we experienced a capstone moment: meeting our senators who signed our scholarships and discussed individualized matters with us. And, lastly, on Thursday, we were set to experience the dubbed “USSYP Super Bowl”: watching the State of the Union address in the White House.

While all of our speakers were truly phenomenal, the most special part of the program was meeting like-minded peers from around the country. Our conversations over delicious desserts, teamwork to curate a dance for the “Spirit of the Coach” Award, and simply collective awe regarding Washington Week’s agenda created memories I will forever hold dear. Additionally, the bonds forged will impact my personal, professional, and political lives. The 62nd annual USSYP cohort is filled with genuine, thoughtful, respectful, and kind future change makers who can- and will- advocate for a more positive future.

After hugging my friends goodbye, I once again found myself in the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. Although I was sad to leave USSYP, I found myself smiling whilst reviewing the photo album curated by our amazing photographers, Jakub and Erin. The impressions of both the U.S. Senate Youth Program and my fellow delegates will always be regarded with nostalgia, happiness, and, of course, knowledge.