

## Kyle Davis, IN – 2024

It is infrequent that one moment in a long and varied life can effect transformative change. Frequently, it takes a collection of moments to create this feeling, a combination of events that, in their totality, create a change in the trajectory of someone's life. Nevertheless, occasionally, through chance or planning, single experiences impress such a profound change on an individual's mind that it alone suffices to change their life. My week in D.C. through the U.S. Senate Youth Program (USSYP) certainly qualifies as one of these experiences.

The first Saturday of Washington Week was for lack of a better word, nerve-wracking. Typically, rooms with lots of unfamiliar people set massive alarm bells in my mind, and to be honest, so did this one. Not only was this a room with relative strangers, but it was also filled with those I knew were accomplished, intelligent, driven, and destined to lead in one way or another. I was desperate to fit into this crowd, which I thought was only a gold crown away from being royalty.

Thankfully, those fears melted away with each conversation I had. Every person I interacted with seemed equally desperate to make connections and seemed as normal as any other person I had met. That night, when I sat around a table with our group's Military Mentor, Captain McGurkin, I realized that the next week was not just going to be a set of incredible, unique experiences but also a week that created a newfound energy toward a guiding principle: public service.

Around that table, Captain McGurkin stressed one thing above all others, "It's not about me." For all the exceptional people we were going to meet who work in areas of government with incredibly diverse purposes, their unifying goal was to improve the lives of others. Beyond personal gain, familial responsibility, or individual quality of life, many of these servants put their needs on the back burner in service of those small changes that they can instigate to better our country and its people. I knew from the moment I had this revelation that I would walk this path.

That's why I have had so much difficulty picking a moment throughout the week to discuss in this essay, as every one of the experiences we had, from meeting Justice Kagan in the Supreme Court to watching the State of the Union in the White House (and later meeting the President himself), have in and of themselves been life-altering and have reaffirmed my burgeoning desire to pursue public service. However, for me, the best moment was the first. Pete Buttigieg is a person who I believed to be larger than life. I had seen him in debates and town halls, but only at USSYP would it be possible to stand across from him, shake his hand, and formally introduce him to speak in front of our fellow delegates. It wasn't just this moment that stayed with me; it was his words and advice to us that we find those things in our lives that drive us through the difficult moments so that we may use that energy to blossom further as people and make this world a better place.

If you read this essay and are trying to decide whether to apply for this program, do so. USSYP will change your life in so many profound ways and allow you to interact with the levers of government in Washington in a manner that few Americans will ever be able to do in their lifetime. Utilize this opportunity because, if granted, you will be among some of the luckiest, most innovative, most driven people in the country's history. That will undoubtedly serve you well and show you that you can make a difference.