

Noah Canada, UT – 2024

The 62nd Annual United States Senate Youth Program transformed the trajectory of my life.

I walked into the Mayflower Hotel on the afternoon of March 2nd unknowing that a single week would secure my faith in the future of our country, ignite a desire within me to make a difference in the world, and introduce me to exceptional young leaders who will certainly be life-long friends.

It is incredibly easy to become cynical about large systems and entities, like those within the United States federal government. I felt that way entering Washington Week. Immersed in a twenty-four-hour news cycle highlighting government inefficiency and unparalleled polarization, I was deeply skeptical of the experiences I was about to have.

That destructive mindset, ablaze in my mind, was quickly extinguished by the authentic love for our country that I saw in every government official we met. Those individuals, yearning to improve our nation through meaningful cooperation, had pure hearts. I began to understand something very important: the majesty of American democracy derives from the hard-working public servants who, behind sensationalist and dystopian headlines, wake up every morning and do work that helps someone somewhere.

I have always known that I want to enter a career that will empower me to find fulfillment through changing the lives of others. The United States Senate Youth Program's Washington Week introduced me to the reality of public service, one so meaningful that I hope to spend the rest of my life engrossed in it.

Without prior knowledge, it would've been impossible to decipher the political ideology of our speakers. From Secretary Pete Buttigieg to Senator John Barrasso, M.D. to Secretary Antony Blinken, to Senator Bill Cassidy, to President Joe Biden, deeply human messages encouraging helpfulness, kindness, grit, and creativity were communicated to us by every speaker. That stuck with me. People who I had never met, but fiercely disagreed with for years, were wonderful and sincere.

When you bring someone to a place where consequential activities occur and tell them that they matter, you are doing a very special thing. I remember having to remind myself that I was not dreaming as I was admiring the carved flowers that adorned the ceiling of the Supreme Court Gallery, waiting for Associate Justice Elena Kagan to arrive. Then, I was in awe at how the Justice's stories of unconventional friendship and learning to question every assumption in one's life matched the magnificence of the neoclassical architecture of the space.

Further, meeting the program's extraordinary Military Mentors helped me to truly understand the sacrifices that our service members make every day. I will never forget the stories that they told me, and how fortunate our country is to have them defending us.

Walking into the East Room of the White House, the site of the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, I couldn't help but reflect on how unimaginable my Week in Washington was. The people I met and the things I learned will influence my life forever. No other program comes close to emulating the United States Senate Youth Program.