

## What USSYP Means to Me

“Look to the sunrise side of the mountain, awaiting the day that is to come rather than the day that has passed.” – Former President George W. Bush, as restated by Mr. Brian Kamoie during Washington Week.

The United States Senate Youth Program is more than a leadership seminar or a scholarship opportunity—it’s a transformative journey. It’s the kind of experience that reshapes your understanding of public service, your role in democracy, and your faith in the future of our country. During Washington Week 2025, as one of two delegates representing the state of Montana, I learned more about American governance—and about the people who serve within it—than I had in all twelve years of my formal education. And perhaps just as meaningfully, I found community among the brightest, kindest, most civically engaged peers I’ve ever met.

It’s hard to pinpoint a single moment that defines what USSYP meant to me, because the entire week was a string of moments that defined an experience certainly greater than simply the sum of its parts.

One afternoon, I stood in the Supreme Court Chamber—a sacred space few Americans ever step foot in—and asked questions of Associate Justice Brett Kavanaugh about judicial ethics, baseball, and the evolution of constitutional law. Another evening, over chocolate-covered strawberries at the Senate Reception, I discussed Montana’s future and my future as an aspiring United States Senator, with Montana’s Senators, Steve Daines and Tim Sheehy. I found myself laughing with new friends and taking great photos in the Benjamin Franklin State Dining Room before Secretary of State Marco Rubio offered both sharp insight and heartfelt advice on navigating politics and public trust in the age of artificial intelligence—all while sitting in a room adjacent to the very desk where the Treaty of Paris was signed to secure American independence.

Each conversation—each moment—carried weight. In a week full of ceremonial halls and historic documents, perhaps the most memorable part was the people. From ambassadors and astronauts to my fellow delegates, every person I encountered reminded me that public service is still deeply human. I spoke with Ambassador George Moose and Ambassador Fajer about diplomacy and global security—complex issues that felt more personal when filtered through their lived experience. I met real-life astronauts from Expedition 71 at NASA Headquarters, including my hero Dr. Mike Barratt, an internal medicine physician who studied the effects of space on the human body. For someone like me, who dreams of a career at the intersection of medicine, research, and policy, it was the most inspiring encounter imaginable. To top it all, I was able to ask my first question of the week!

These moments were not just extraordinary—they were transformative. I came to Washington—for my third time visiting our nation’s capital-- as a student of government. I left as a steward of its future. The United States Senate Youth Program is a call to action, a rare space where idealism and realism coexist, where young people are told—genuinely and without pretense—that we matter. That our voices belong in the rooms where decisions are made. That our questions and convictions are not distractions, but signs that we’re paying attention.

USSYP reminded me that leadership is not always loud. Sometimes, it looks like listening carefully. Sometimes, it looks like quietly showing up—for your community, your country, your classmates. Sometimes, it looks like honoring those who served before you. One of the most humbling moments of the week was being selected as one of four delegates to participate in the wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery. Standing in solemn silence, surrounded by the weight of history and sacrifice, I thought of my ancestors who served in the military—of the generations who believed in a country they might never see fully realized. That moment grounded everything else. It reminded me that public service is not about recognition or rank—it’s about respect, remembrance, and responsibility. It’s about carrying forward the legacy of those who gave everything, by giving what you can.

And of course, no reflection on Washington Week would be complete without a nod to the food. Every meal felt like a state dinner—with pastries too pretty to eat (though we absolutely did), perfectly plated entrées, and tasty coffee to round out each dining experience. It became a running joke among all delegates and distinguished guests alike that we were truly spoiled—and honestly, we were. All week.

In the years to come, I will carry the lessons of Washington Week with me: in my studies, in my service, and in the way I lead. I will remember the sunrise side of the mountain—not just as a metaphor, but as a mindset. It is hard to believe, but this program, in all its glory, was not the peak of my journey, but the beginning of it. And now, I look to the horizon—not with hesitation, but with hope for what the future holds.