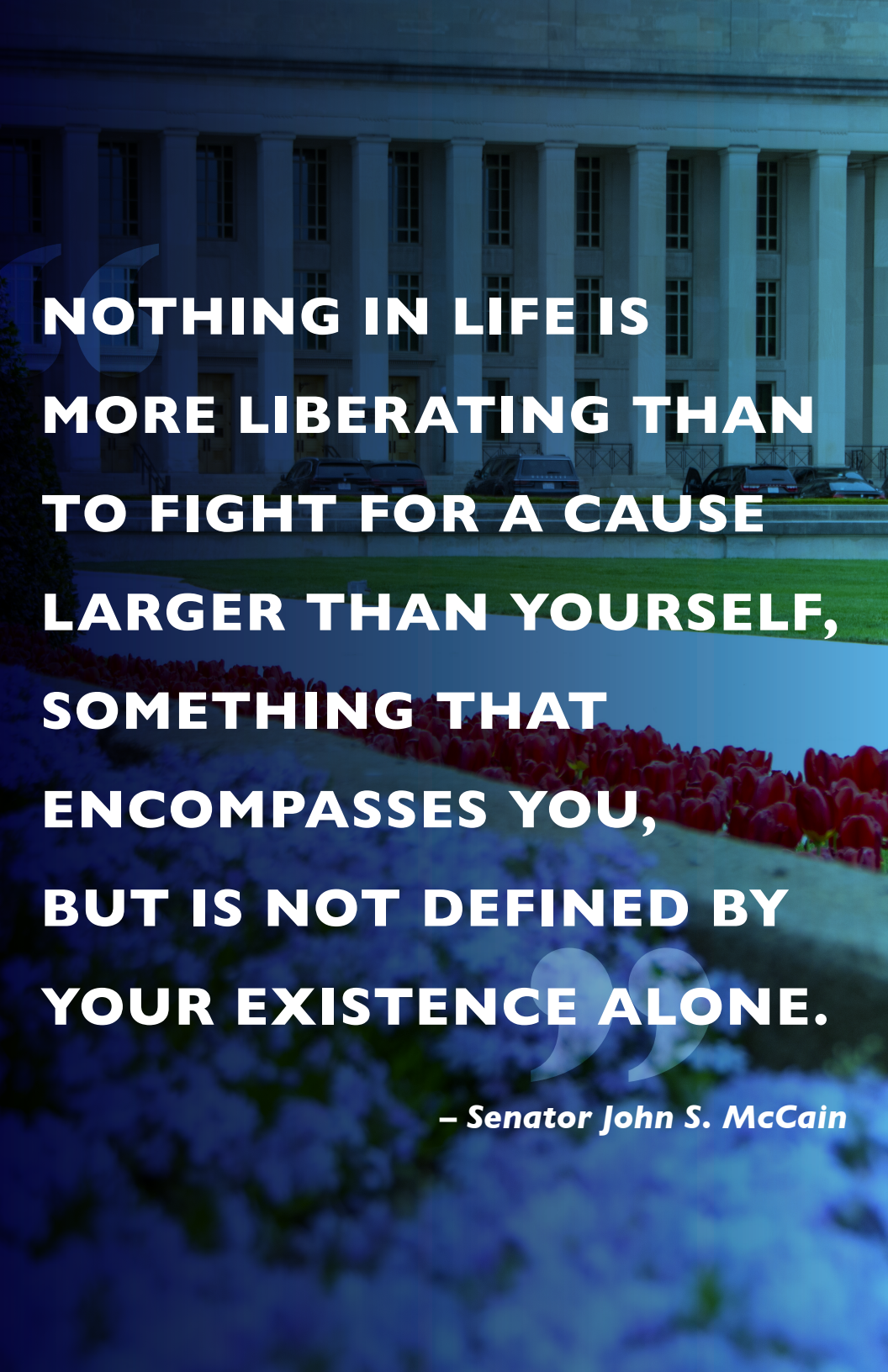




JOHN S. MCCAIN STRATEGIC DEFENSE FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

A blue-tinted photograph of the White House, showing its iconic columns and portico. In the foreground, there is a green lawn and a row of red tulips. Several cars are parked in front of the building. The quote is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. A large, faint, light blue quotation mark is visible in the background, partially obscured by the text.

**NOTHING IN LIFE IS
MORE LIBERATING THAN
TO FIGHT FOR A CAUSE
LARGER THAN YOURSELF,
SOMETHING THAT
ENCOMPASSES YOU,
BUT IS NOT DEFINED BY
YOUR EXISTENCE ALONE.**

– Senator John S. McCain

INTRODUCING THE FELLOWSHIP

The John S. McCain Strategic Defense Fellowship Program is a highly selective, 12-month immersive appointment designed to develop the next generation of civilian leaders in national security. Implemented by the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019, the program provides recent advanced-degree graduates with the opportunity to work alongside senior defense officials, contribute to high-impact policy initiatives, and help drive innovation across the Department.

Fellows are placed across a wide range of DoD Components and mission areas – including policy, intelligence, acquisitions, research, and more – with all opportunities located in the National Capital Region. Through real-world assignments and targeted professional development, Fellows build the leadership skills and strategic perspective essential to advancing U.S. national security.

As a McCain Fellow, you will help drive the mission forward – where strategy, service, and innovation meet.



IGNITE YOUR IMPACT

The McCain Fellowship is built on a dual promise: to develop the leader you are today, and to launch the leader you'll become tomorrow.

As a training ground, the program places fellows in immersive roles at the center of the Department of Defense. You'll take on real-world challenges, contribute to mission-driven work, and gain exposure to strategic policymaking, interagency collaboration, and operations that shape national defense — all while receiving mentorship and structured learning tailored to your career goals.

Your time as a McCain Fellow isn't just developmental – it's transformational. The foundation you build here will open doors and give you the tools to lead from wherever you stand.

A Year in the Life of a Fellow



SENIOR MENTORSHIP

As a key pillar of the fellowship program, Fellows build a meaningful relationship with a senior leader within the Department of Defense. This mentorship offers Fellows with access to important knowledge, career development support, and strategic advice that expands the fellow's understanding of the Department's mission while fellows navigate complex challenges in their field.



NETWORKING

Fellows engage in a dynamic networking experience, connecting with peers, program alumni, employees and senior leaders across the Department. Through program events, hands-on collaboration, and meaningful engagements, they gain access to valuable insights and build connections that enhance their personal and professional growth. These connections continue to support and empower them well beyond the fellowship year.



TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

Fellows work through an Individual Development plan that outlines personalized training and development goals, with the support of a training stipend to pursue relevant courses, trainings, and certification programs. These opportunities are designed to strengthen their skills, advance their professional development, and support their growth as future leaders.

THE MOST REWARDING ASPECT OF MY FELLOWSHIP WAS THE ABILITY TO WORK ON VERY HIGH LEVEL PORTFOLIOS IN A FAST PACED ENVIRONMENT. THE FELLOWSHIP PROVIDED THE OPPORTUNITY TO FACILITATE THAT AND BECAUSE OF THAT, I'VE BEEN ABLE TO LEAD LONG TERM STRATEGIC ASSESSMENTS.

- Elliot Seckler, Cohort 3 Fellow, ODA&M



SPECIAL ENGAGEMENTS

Throughout the Fellowship year, exclusive engagements are curated in partnership with various components across the Department of Defense, offering fellows with direct access to key leaders overseeing critical mission areas. These interactive educational briefings and discussions with key leaders provide unparalleled insights into high-level leadership, organizational decision making, and the critical initiatives that drive the Department's mission.



REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE

Fellows gain invaluable experiential learning by working on key projects that directly contribute to the Department of Defense's mission. The opportunity to engage in these experiences accelerates their development and positions them for future career successes.





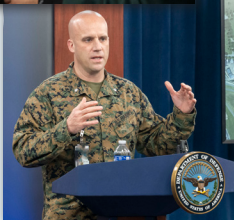
LEARN FROM LEADERS

Guided by Mentors

Throughout the Fellowship, you will build a relationship with a senior leader (GS-15 and/or SES) who offers you personalized guidance, insight, and support. This one-on-one mentorship will guide you as you navigate the Department and helps you facilitate your personal and professional growth.

Connected to Leadership

From curated events to everyday workplace interactions, you will gain direct exposure to senior leaders across the Department. These experiences offer invaluable insights into the strategic decision-making and expand your professional perspective.



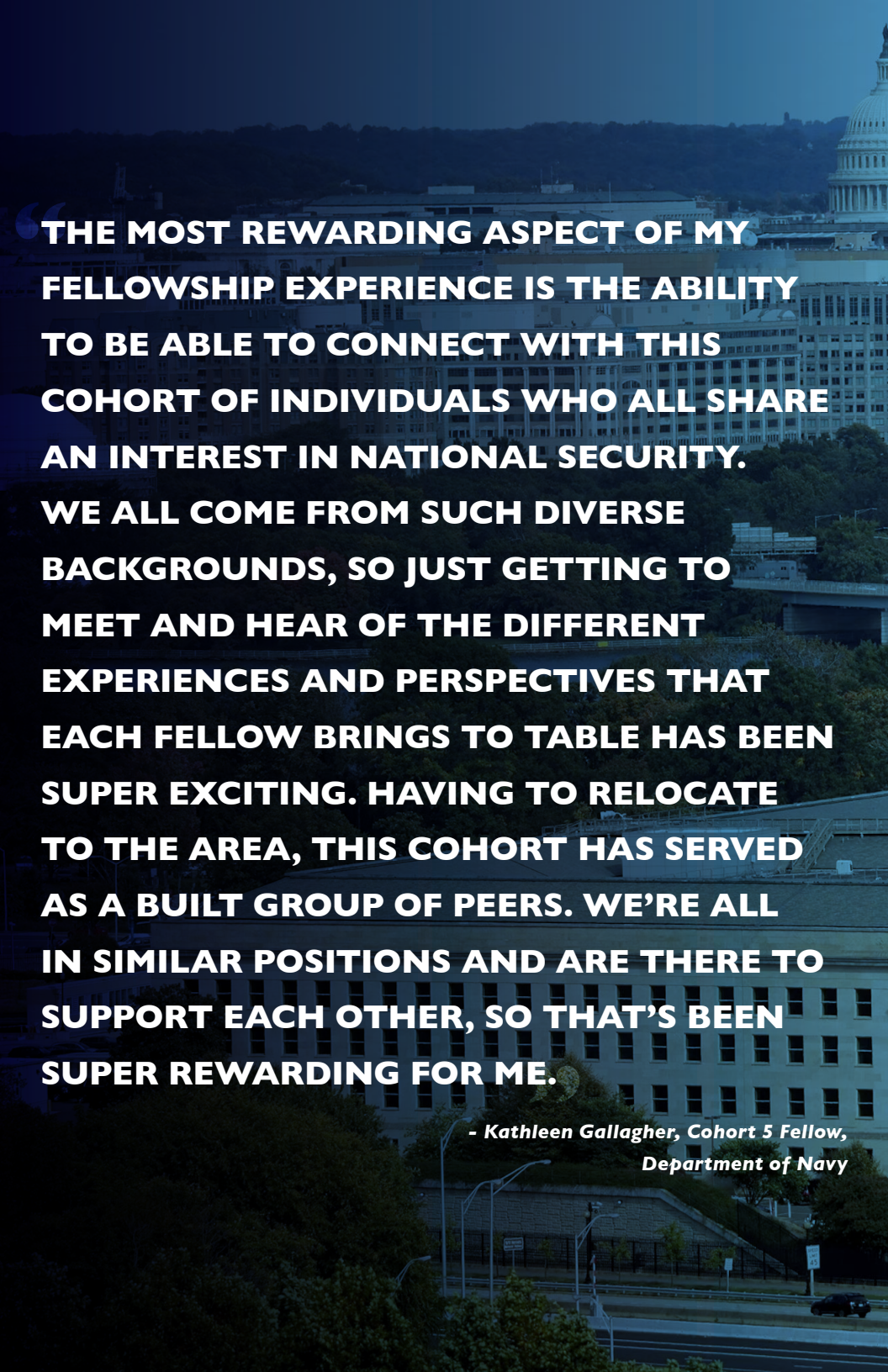


BUILD CONNECTIONS THAT LAST

Join a vibrant, mission-driven community where relationships are built to endure. You'll form strong bonds within your cohort through shared experiences, collaboration, and support. The fellowship also connects you to a growing community of alumni and future fellows – opening the door to mentorship, inspiration, and long-term professional opportunities. Along the way, you'll expand your network across the Department, building meaningful relationships with leaders and peers that will support your career well beyond the fellowship year.

“THE MCCAIN FELLOWSHIP IS A TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCE THAT WILL ACCELERATE YOUR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND EQUIP YOU WITH THE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE NECESSARY TO MAKE A MEANINGFUL CONTRIBUTION TO PUBLIC SERVICE.

- Cohort 3 Fellow, OUSD Policy



“THE MOST REWARDING ASPECT OF MY FELLOWSHIP EXPERIENCE IS THE ABILITY TO BE ABLE TO CONNECT WITH THIS COHORT OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ALL SHARE AN INTEREST IN NATIONAL SECURITY. WE ALL COME FROM SUCH DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS, SO JUST GETTING TO MEET AND HEAR OF THE DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES THAT EACH FELLOW BRINGS TO TABLE HAS BEEN SUPER EXCITING. HAVING TO RELOCATE TO THE AREA, THIS COHORT HAS SERVED AS A BUILT GROUP OF PEERS. WE’RE ALL IN SIMILAR POSITIONS AND ARE THERE TO SUPPORT EACH OTHER, SO THAT’S BEEN SUPER REWARDING FOR ME.

*- Kathleen Gallagher, Cohort 5 Fellow,
Department of Navy*

FROM OUR FELLOWS & ALUMNI



HENRI-NICOLAS GROSSMAN

Cohort 3 Fellow, OUSD Policy

“The McCain Fellowship afforded me tremendous opportunities during the fellowship and then teed me up in a really ideal way for a fulfilling career in the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Policy working on critical foreign policy issues.”



GABRIELLE KAYE

Cohort 5 Fellow, OUSD Comptroller

“The Assistant Deputy Chief Financial Officer agreed to be my mentor and having started as an intern in the Department herself over 30 years ago, it’s been incredible hearing her best practices and lessons learned. Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Comptroller has provided great mentorship from strong leaders, and the opportunity to grow has been limitless.”



ONA SPREENBERG

Cohort 5 Fellow, Department of the Air Force

“It is an honor being in the Pentagon every day and serving my country is incredibly meaningful. I’ve been able to apply my skills and previous experiences to help ensure that our Air Force is as strong as it can be, while also supporting foreign partners and building capacity with allied nations to ease the burden on U.S. forces. I’m forever grateful to the McCain Fellowship Program for introducing me to this universe – It has opened a door to a whole new world I now get to explore.”



MATTHEW CALOGERO

Cohort 5 Fellow, Department of the Army

“What has impacted me the most are the people I’ve worked with and had the opportunity to meet. Working in Army Legislation, I’ve been inspired by my colleagues’ passion for public service, their deep sense of patriotism, and their daily commitment to making Army better. That experience has stayed with me more than anything else.”

More voices await. Join us online.

START YOUR FUTURE IN PUBLIC SERVICE

Visit our website to learn more about the program and for detailed application requirements.

The fellowship program is competitive, and applicants are evaluated on their technical and professional excellence, character, commitment to public service, and academic achievement. All applicants must be able to successfully meet the eligibility requirements and pass background and security investigations.



**THE FELLOWSHIP IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR
DISCOVERY AND DEVELOPMENT.**

– Grayson Rosenfeld, Cohort 3 Fellow



CHOOSE SERVICE. BECOME A MCCAIN FELLOW.



Scan the QR Code for more,
and reach out to us via email:

whs.mccainfellows@mail.mil



U.S. Department of Defense