

Rahman Adekunle, MO – 2026

For as long as I can remember, I have felt pulled in two directions. My whole life I have wanted to be a doctor. Spending time with patients, learning their stories, being present in the hardest moments of their lives, that is something I love deeply. But I have also been obsessed with this country. What it stands for, how its government works, what it owes the people living inside it. For years those two passions felt like a tension I would eventually have to resolve. Washington Week was the first time in my life I was surrounded by people who understood exactly what that feeling was, even if their version of it looked completely different.

From the moment I landed and walked into a baggage claim full of Military Mentors who were genuinely worried I had gotten lost, something shifted. Dr. Major Tony Starks was unlike anyone I had encountered before, a man who carried authority and warmth in equal measure, and the other Military Mentors were no different. My group, the Avengers, filled the early mornings and late nights with the kind of conversations that are hard to manufacture and impossible to forget. On Coach 3, we played Imposter every single bus ride. It sounds small. It was not.

The week moved between the historic and the surreal without ever slowing down to let you catch your breath. We walked the halls of the Pentagon, which is a sentence I am still getting used to saying. I had lunch at the top of the State Department looking out over a city that was starting to feel less foreign by the hour. I sat inside the Supreme Court and listened to Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson speak, compressing what felt like concert-level electricity into a hand that stayed steady every time she opened the floor for questions. I ate lunch beside Senator Baldwin with nothing but a sandwich between us, and across the room at dinner sat General Charles Bolden, a man who has literally orbited this earth. None of it felt like a photo opportunity. All of it felt earned.

Part of what made it feel that way were the huddles before every speaker, crowded around the lunch table, drafting the sharpest questions we could think of, and the quiet celebration that rippled through the group when one of us finally got called on. I filled an entire notebook with words from those sessions, things I heard that I knew I needed to bring home and share with my community. Every page is proof that we were not just tourists in those rooms.

What struck me most was not any single room or any single person. It was the realization, somewhere between a late night card game on the TSA floor with Cecilia and Garrett at 4 am and a three-course dinner with some of the smartest people I have ever met, that the hunger driving every one of us was the same. One hundred and four students from 50 states, one district, and the DODEA, each chasing something different, each refusing to settle for less than all of it. I had spent years feeling like that was something to apologize for. That week, I found out it was something to build on.