

## **Ian McCabe, NH – 2019**

Before flying to Washington, D.C. for the United States Senate Youth Program, the greatest piece of advice I was given was to “listen, be a sponge, and take in absolutely everything.” Having internalized this recommendation, I hope to both pass forward this same message to future delegates and continue to apply it to every facet of my life. The Washington Week emphasized the diverse set of beliefs in the United States and that there is no limit to how much can be learned. Whether talking to my roommate from across the country or eating breakfast with people from Massachusetts, Mississippi, and South Dakota, I was constantly exposed to unique and unfamiliar viewpoints. Not only that, but each day was stacked with truly inspiring and thought-provoking speakers. Throughout the week, I tried to be a sponge and soak up every word ranging from never straying from your moral compass to never losing sight of your loyalty to the greatest legal document ever written: the U.S. Constitution.

One of the many highlights of the week was undoubtedly listening to Secretary Benjamin S. Carson. In addition to speaking of the stability, peace, opportunities, and prosperity that America offers, he added onto the piece of advice I was given before the week began. He told us to “acquire as much knowledge as you can” to “use your spears of influence” in a positive light. Throughout his inspiring stories of how he overcame tremendous obstacles such as growing up with a single mother in Detroit, I sat glued to my seat growing increasingly confident in our nation’s opportunities and the vitality of the American Dream.

As I listened to the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Paul J. Selva in the Pentagon, he spoke of the immense responsibilities of his position. He told stories of his handling of highly confidential material throughout the day ranging from terrorist groups to China to North Korea. Even with these duties, General Selva insisted that every single leader is human and that it is okay to admit that you do not know something. He referenced his many speeches to Congress and said that he will never give a false answer. All through the week, each leader exemplified the ideal characteristics of a civil servant through their dedication to uphold the Constitution.

To identify the impact of every speaker would most definitely take up a couple of hundred pages. Between listening to Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, Secretary Ben Carson, meeting my senator, Maggie Hassan, and shaking President Donald Trump’s hand in the White House, I cannot overstate how impactful this experience has been. My time in the White House was absolutely incredible, and I will forever remember every second of meeting President Trump. Words cannot describe my feelings when the leader of the free world stood feet away and shook my hand, or when many of my political role models were simultaneously in the same room at the annual Senate Reception.

The excitement and most common congratulatory words back home have most certainly centered around the \$10,000 scholarship for further education. While I will be forever grateful for the monetary reward, the week itself has made me more proud, inspired, thoughtful, patriotic, and excited for my upcoming years than any other experience of my life. Since the moment I embraced my peers goodbye and headed to the airport, I have thought about the Washington Week almost every hour of the day. Every morning when I open up my computer and see the picture of President Trump standing two people

away from me, I still can't believe that I had the opportunity to shake the president's hand in the White House. Every hour of the week was filled with truly once-in-a-lifetime moments that I will forever cherish.

Nowhere else can someone say that he or she is in a room with another 103 high school students who are equally passionate, ambitious, and thought-provoking. I was amazed that we were constantly debating domestic and foreign affairs, yet never with an accusatory tone. Instead, we were all sincerely respectful of one another's point of views and excited to hear numerous perspectives. In a time where division often drowns out civility in our national discourse, it is beyond comforting to have engaging discussions ranging from healthcare to the national debt in which every opinion is equally valued. I cannot emphasize enough how much faith the conversations gave me for our nation's future as every time I looked around, I saw 103 civil and sincere future politicians, lawyers, doctors, and leaders.

As I recall my experiences at the 57th Annual United States Senate Youth Program, I could not be more grateful. Through interactions with my peers, the Military Mentors, and the speakers, I learned more than I could have ever imagined, and I am proud of how much I grew as a person. I hope that my week in Washington was only the beginning of many opportunities in our nation's capital.