

## John Fannon, VT – 2019

Looking back on the Washington week, I am amazed by the amount we were able to fit into a week. I walked away from each speaker with a new perspective and an invigorated faith in the men and women who work every day, out of the spotlight, to make the government and country better for all Americans. It was their commitment to service that was inspiring. My favorite speakers were the ones who did not shy away from the issues our nation is facing and who were frank with us about the world and the struggles we face. Speakers who are not as politically entrenched and who were able to share their unique insights with us, as fellow Americans, were the best.

A moment that I think captures the spirit of service, and the modesty we all should aspire to, was the entrance of Chief Justice Roberts. We were all seated, chatting and waiting for him to arrive, when, without ceremony, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court entered. Here, standing before us, one of the most influential people in American government didn't waste a moment on himself or his own ego. And, throughout his Q&A with us, his modesty and reverence for the institutions, which we are all tasked with curating, were refreshing in the febrile political environment of the current period.

I will not go through each speaker and share how they each impressed me, but there were some words said to us that I think reflect the magnanimity and the purpose of the Senate Youth Program. Several said that we, the delegates, are not only the leaders of tomorrow, but we are the leaders of today and what we do now can produce change in ways we cannot imagine. This message is one from the past week that, above all else, I will carry with me going forward.

As amazing as the speakers we heard from and places we visited, the true people who made Washington week so amazing were my fellow delegates. The first thing I noticed reading the postings on Facebook was how incredibly accomplished everyone was. Arriving in Washington and meeting the other delegates, I saw the depth and the character that made each person someone who I would only be saddened to leave when the week was through. I was continuously amazed by the authenticity and knowledge of my fellow delegates and found their insights into the political issues of our day to often be the most poignant. People back home have asked me questions like "who did you see?" or "who was the best speaker?" and these are fair questions, but, for me, these questions missed the heart of the week. Learning from each other and building connections with peers will have a lifelong impact on me and I trust the same will be true for my fellow program attendees. It was on the buses, in the mezzanine, over a meal and in the rare moments of free time, that I learned the most and made the connections I know will last a lifetime.

A week is a short amount of time to develop truly deep bonds, but if there ever was an environment where it was possible it would be the United States Senate Youth Program. The intelligence and curiosity of my peers and the kindness and respect for different opinions the delegates had for each other was inspiring and very much the best part of the week for me.

I would of course be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the folks who made this week possible. The Hearst Foundations' generosity in underwriting the week was incredible and this opportunity literally would not have been possible without it. The staff and Military Mentors who made this week logistically possible and smooth are all amazing and I cannot thank them enough. It was a once in a lifetime experience and I am forever in debt to everyone who made this week special.