

## **George Cecil, ID – 2022**

My time spent with the United States Senate Youth Program has impacted my life beyond measure and will continue to inspire me for years to come. Although I would have loved for the esteemed Washington Week to be in person, the virtual experience far exceeded my expectations and was a significant moment in my life.

I would like to take a moment to reflect on some of the most unforgettable moments during Washington Week, including the Suez Canal diplomacy situation, and keynote speakers Justice Anthony Kennedy, and Senator Cory Gardner.

My experience with the Diplomacy Simulation centered around the Suez Canal was one of the most interesting things I have done in my life. I have had the opportunity to practice debating in a number of environments, but the diplomacy situation was much more interesting than a typical debate. Instead of the goal being to destroy your opponent's argument, the true objective was to represent a country while attempting to find common ground with the other perspectives. I found this to be much more enjoyable and challenging than a common debate, and I am so thankful that the Senate Youth Staff included this in our Washington Week.

Another incredible opportunity I had during Washington Week was to listen to Justice Anthony Kennedy. Justice Kennedy's words about our Constitution, the checks and balances of our government, and his passion for freedom continue to inspire me to this day. In the middle of his presentation, he made the statement "the flag protects those who hate it." This declaration really made me ponder his words and think about the significance of this statement. It gave me a new level of realization about the uniqueness of America in relation to the rest of the world. I am humbled that one could hate the land in which you live, but the values of the country are so strong as to protect your right to hate. That is the picture of a strong country.

Another incredible speaker I got to meet was Senator Cory Gardner. At one point in his speech, he said, "you are all here today because someone saw potential in you, someone saw something in you, don't waste it." These words inspired and encouraged me to seek opportunities to serve my country. With these few perceptive words, my outlook on life has changed for the better. I now live everyday as if I have potential for greatness, and I cannot thank the USSYP enough for this opportunity.

Additionally, I want to profusely thank my military mentor, Captain Grizzle for all of her time and dedication to our group. She was a constant inspiration and gave us countless amounts of life advice for our future. I am so grateful for the gift of a "mentor for life." I would also like to thank Mr. Cox, Ms. Guilford, the Hearst Foundations, and all of the staff that made the week possible.