



## **2019 Eikenberg Scholarship Recipient – Ashwin Siddaraju**

### **Reflections on the One Voice Trip**

It was quite the honor to be named the recipient of the Eikenberg Scholarship and be given an experience and opportunity to travel to Washington D.C. Being able to take on this journey and endeavor with a very diverse coalition of McLean County leaders, that represent various factions and groups such as labor, agriculture, government, and education, among others within the community, made this opportunity all the more rewarding. Having those meaningful conversations, the ability to network and connect with those who have made it their lives work to constantly see the community prosper, reduce inequities within the community, and most of all to correct and fix deficiencies within our current system to ensure that quality of life never diminishes, was truly a surreal experience. It is called “One Voice” for a reason. No matter the individual political affiliation, prejudice of congressional leaders, or differences that preside amongst one another, all of that is set to the side in order see the shared goals and values of the community to fruition. This is done through advocacy of economic development projects, to seek funding, and holding meetings with various governmental agencies, think tanks, organizations, and congressional leaders from both The House and The Senate. I gained a substantial amount of professional development throughout the process. All of the lessons, skills, and knowledge that I have gained throughout the experience will be transcendent, as I start on my personal, professional career path.

I would absolutely and highly recommend any student, who is interested in advocacy, potentially entering government work, increasing their understanding of the local community, those interested in civic engagement, outspoken, rising community leaders, interdisciplinary experiences, developing lasting relationship through networking, increasing their aptitude, all while experiencing Washington D.C. I cannot express how truly grateful I am to the EDC staff for allowing me to receive this scholarship. It was truly a one of a kind experience and one that I will cherish for a long time. I can honestly say

that I am much better off for making the connections that I did with local leaders, congressional leaders in D.C. along with the EDC staff. Being able to ask questions to all of those individuals, whom I respect and think very highly of, allowed me to garner a broader and more holistic understanding and perspective on a plethora of local, state, and federal topics. This trip challenged me to get out of my comfort zone, whether it be through public speaking, interpersonal connections, and testing my general knowledge on local issues. Aside from the business portion, there were moments of entertainment sprinkled in there as well. I was also able to experience a lot of Washington D.C. has to offer, such as touring the White House and indulging the foody inside me at fantastic dining establishments every day, with the EDC staff. Washington D.C. is an addicting environment and it reaffirmed my interest into the policy making culture. I want to make lasting and enduring change, on the legislative level, and this trip, got me one step closer to seeing that ambition to success.



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