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"One Union, One Family, One Fight"

Growing up with a dad in the union and a grandfather who paved the way for him to enter the union, I've been a part of many conversations and heard many debates. Through all the discussions, I've learned that speaking up isn't optional, it's necessary! I've learned that solidarity isn't just about agreement, it's about trust, shared responsibility, and lifting each other up, especially in tough times. I have seen firsthand how people who might not have much, can still want to give everything they have to help a neighbor or coworker. In a household where fairness, respect, and dignity at work were daily conversations, I was taught to use my voice, to ask questions, and to stand up not only for myself, but for others as well. Although I didn't completely understand what that meant when I was younger, I have grown to realize that the passion and drive of a union household has instilled many values that are at the core of who I am; and essentially why I do things the way I do.

Union life has taught me to be brave. I've been surrounded by people who have had to fight for what they have; who stood up even when it was risky or uncomfortable. That bravery has shaped me. It taught me that being assertive doesn't have to mean being aggressive. It simply means knowing who you are, standing by your values, and not letting fear make decisions for you. When contemplating early graduation versus studying abroad, it definitely led to some inner personal struggles. Even though the thought of studying abroad was intriguing and exciting, it was also something that could hinder my ability to graduate early; something I had been working so hard to achieve. In addition to the unknown of my high school career dreams, it was also scary to think about being so far away, but also an exciting prospect at the same time. These decisions proved to be very difficult for a determined student like myself. I did choose to seize the opportunity to study abroad in Germany and it allowed me to grow as an individual, and to realize my potential as an independent young person in this world. It also helped me realize that although it wasn't the initial plan and led to some risk, it proved to be one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

Union life has also taught me how to advocate. I know now that change only happens when people are willing to speak up. That lesson has made me unafraid to raise my hand in class, ask a teacher for extra help when I needed it, or even challenge my high school when they said that a year early graduation couldn't be achieved. I do not shy away from difficult conversations because I've seen that respectful, yet firm dialogue is how problems get solved. Because of these conversations and negotiations, I was able to work with my school leaders, and this is how we developed a plan that allowed me to still graduate as a Junior; despite my study abroad which I knew would derail my initial plans. Not only did I graduate an entire year early, but I was also one of the first Juniors to graduate as a valedictorian! The other early Junior graduate valedictorian and I quickly bonded over this similarity, much like I've seen happen when talking about what a benefit it is to be part of a union in general.

These lessons have given me confidence, not just in myself, but in others. I know that I do not have to do everything alone, and I know that real strength comes from standing shoulder to shoulder with others. Whether I'm speaking in front of my class, helping a friend through a tough time, or thinking about my future, I do so with the pride and grounding that comes from being raised in a union family. I know how to listen, to organize, and to lead with heart.

College will bring about new challenges, but thanks to my union upbringing, I'm walking in hopeful; but also fully prepared to stand my ground with confidence and respect. Union life didn't just shape the person I am, it shaped the student and leader I'm becoming. Now as I step into college, I will carry those lessons with me. They have made me self-assured, self-aware, assertive, and ready to lead!

"One Union, One Family, One Fight" isn't just a slogan- it's part of my foundation. It's a promise that I carry with me, and one I plan to continue to utilize for years to come. The union way has shaped my home life, my values, and my voice, and because of that, I stand tall, proud, and ready to help build a future where no one is left behind. My college pursuit of becoming a doctor will certainly fulfill these promises of not only helping others, but advocating for those less fortunate, and helping them realize that their voice matters too!