

When school ended last year I thought I was in for a slow summer. I only had one exciting event planned, Oregon Boys State. I did not dream of a free trip to Washington, D.C. or the opportunity to interact with so many amazing delegates from all over the United States. I loved Boys Nation. Needless to say, I am exceedingly grateful to the American Legion, Department of Oregon and to Post 11 my original sponsor.

I worried at first that I would not be good enough for Boys Nation. Some Boys State programs that I had heard of had over a thousand participants, compared to Oregon's one hundred forty. I thought that the delegates chosen from these programs must be superhuman. While the delegates were largely brilliant, they were all discussion. In fact, I found that the greatest strength of Boys Nation delegates in general is the ability to discuss issues civilly. Every delegate was capable of expressing their ideas well and absorbing the others' ideas, and no matter how hot the debate became the delegates were still friendly afterward. Where at first I was intimidated, I soon felt completely at ease.

Just as I could not have asked for better delegates, I can't think of a better city for Boys Nation. The atmosphere in Washington, D.C. is pure politics and the monuments are inspiring, a perfect combination for aspiring leaders. I had been to D.C. once before Boys Nation and I knew what a treat a second visit would be. I was not disappointed. The buildings were even bigger than I remembered. Even without the amazing Boys Nation program I am indebted to the Legion for a trip to America's awesome capital.

Though seeing Washington, D.C. was inspiring, the real reason for Boys Nation is to run a top notch Senate simulation. Elections were the first step. It was interesting to see so many charismatic people compete for votes. Just like in real politics candidates avoided taking clear stances, for fear of losing votes. After all the positions were filled was when the most vehement debate hit the senate floor.

One debate, on random drug screening for welfare recipients, was particularly intense. The bill was proposed as a way to avoid having tax dollars fund drug use. The idea was that welfare recipients who used drugs were clearly not putting in the necessary effort to get back on their feet. This struck me and many other proponents of the bill as a straightforward common sense way to lessen welfare fraud. I did not expect the violent opposition that the bill encountered. It was decried as degrading and disrespectful because some delegates had seen the benefits of welfare personally. This perspective was wholly new to me, and though I kept the same position on this issue, my eyes were opened to a perspective I had not before considered. At Boys Nation, with delegates from all over America, I experienced new ideas like this over and over.

I could say more about Boys Nation, but I believe that I have made my point. I can't think of an experience to compare to it. To be singled out for such an amazing experience is an honor of which I can only hope to be worthy. I hope the Legion will accept my gratitude, as I have nothing of comparable value to offer in return for my Boys Nation experience.

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