



Local Students Experience the Trip of a Lifetime: Youth Tour

SAN BERNARD ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE was honored to send two Waller High School seniors, Samantha Gray and Christian Turrubiarres, on the Government-in-Action Youth Tour trip to Washington, D.C., June 16–24. Another SBEC member, Darby Phillips from Hallettsville, was the SBEC alternate for this year and happily said yes to attending Youth Tour as the replacement for a student from Deaf Smith Electric Cooperative.

These three were part of the 147 students sponsored by Texas electric cooperatives who had a chance to learn firsthand about our great American history and culture.

“I didn’t find out I was going until a couple hours before we were supposed to meet in Austin,” Phillips said. “Once I arrived in Austin, I entered a room full of strangers. Little did I know, those strangers would soon turn into my best friends, and saying goodbye would be one of the hardest things.”

The trip began in Austin, where the students registered and received their backpacks with matching shirts for the trip, spending money and an itinerary. They participated in a welcome dinner where they mingled with other participants and chaperones and heard from Esther Dominguez, Texas Electric

Cooperatives’ Youth Tour coordinator.

The next day, they departed on a charter plane for D.C. For the next week, this large group of students from across Texas would visit museums, meet their congressional representatives on Capitol Hill and learn more about their role in our cooperative world.

“This trip wasn’t at all what I had anticipated,” Gray said. “I was stepping out of my comfort zone applying for this trip, and the idea of traveling with 140-odd other strangers was intimidating to me. I’m not typically a social person, but I made so many new connections on this trip.”

“If I had told myself before the trip the number of people that I’d spoken to, shared smiles with and taken pictures with, I would’ve laughed straight into my own face.”

When asked what his most memorable experience on the trip was, Turrubiarres recollected the day he stood in front of the Supreme Court building.

“The moment at which I stood before the Supreme Court building of the United States comes to mind when I picture my week in D.C.,” Turrubiarres said. “Unlike its depiction in photos



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1. From left: Darby Phillips, Samantha Gray and Chris Turrubiarres in front of the U.S. Capitol.
2. Gray and Turrubiarres with friends before a performance at the Kennedy Center.
3. Texas Youth Tour participants in front of the White House.
4. Phillips and new friends at the National Mall.
5. Phillips and a friend before going into the Museum of the Bible.

or videos, the building stood tall and mighty. While it lacked the flashes of professional cameras or questioning of curious journalists, I was able to see how our government functioned through one individual who stood before the fence: a protester.

“This person represented far more than anger at the decisions of the county, rather it invoked within me a sense of justice in our society. The very fact that I was able to listen and understand a point of view from someone who was so clearly passionate about a topic represents the very thing that makes our country great: the ability to peacefully and civilly outline the issues our government faces.”

While the monuments and sights of D.C. are a memorable part of the trip, some participants found their favorite part of the experience was the people they met.

“My most memorable experience of the trip would have to be the last night in D.C.,” Phillips said. “As I sat outside, watching the sunset, with my new best friend, Chasidy, I realized that the bliss of the trip would soon end, and I would go back to reality. The rest of my night was spent playing games and talking with all my new friends.”

The students have a full schedule while on Youth Tour, packing in all the history in and around D.C. A typical day begins around 6:30 a.m. and doesn’t end until lights are out around 10:30 p.m.



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One day might include visiting the White House, spending the day exploring the Smithsonian Institution museums and touring memorials before attending a Youth Day rally with students from electric cooperatives across the country.

“Easily the most memorable experience was the speech given by Mike Schlappi on Youth Day,” Gray said. “When you’re put in a room with roughly 2,000 other kids, sitting shoulder to shoulder and are expected to sit for hours listening to speech after speech, you expect to get a little bored at some point. However, Mike had the ability to keep the entire room’s eyes on him. He made all of us laugh and cry within his given time limit.”

“His speech specifically resonated with me because the play-by-play he gave us about the day he was paralyzed was eerily similar to the emotions and distress I felt when experiencing my own tragedy—surviving a house fire. He showed me that despite different lives and experiences, no one is ever alone in their trauma.”

When applying for Youth Tour, many students don’t realize how different this trip is and why it’s often described as the trip of a lifetime. Each student takes away something that makes this trip special to them.

“Without this trip, I would’ve remained anxious about my goals to serve as a public servant in the judicial branch,” Turru-



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1. Samantha Gray and Chris Turrubiarres at the Supreme Court.
2. Youth Tour rally speaker Mike Schlappi, left, and Gray.
3. From left: Turrubiarres, Darby Phillips and Gray before going into the office of Rep. Michael McCaul.

biartes said. “Any kind of insecurity at my ability to move the cogs of government in Washington were swiftly dispelled for good. This trip does far more than show you landmarks and tourist attractions; it is capable of creating a grand shift in your mentality. Wisdom and understanding of our government come at the cost of age and sacrifice for many American citizens, so do not let a chance to gain those experiences at an early age slip away.”

We asked each student if they would recommend this trip to their peers, and they all came back with a definite yes.

“Absolutely I would recommend this trip, even if some find themselves questioning if this kind of trip is right for them,” Gray said. “I stepped way outside my comfort zone going on this trip, but I don’t regret applying in the slightest. You’ll find yourself with companions from across the country. Even if you aren’t interested in the location, it’s the people you’re going with that make the tour a cherished experience.”

This trip leaves a lasting impression on all those who attend. It becomes more of an experience than just a trip and brings to life the rich culture and history that makes the U.S. the great country it is today.

“I would absolutely recommend this trip to everyone,” Phillips said. “I had so much fun and met so many amazing people. I’m extremely grateful for this awesome opportunity, amazing friendships and memories that will last a lifetime.”

SBEC loved hearing about the different experiences each student enjoyed on this year’s trip. We loved watching their different personalities unfold as the trip happened and seeing how in just eight days, their lives changed.

We wish each student the best as they begin new chapters and continue learning and growing in the fall. Phillips will be a junior at Hallettsville High School, and Gray and Turrubiarres will begin their higher education outside of Texas.

Turrubiarres will attend Columbia University where he will major in political science. Gray will be a freshman at Boston University, where she will major in biology.

For more information on the 2025 Youth Tour, visit sbec.org or follow us on Instagram at [SanBernardElectric](https://www.instagram.com/SanBernardElectric) or on Facebook at [facebook.com/sbecoop](https://www.facebook.com/sbecoop). ■