

# NORTH PLAINS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

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## My Days in D.C.

BY BEN WILLIAMS

**B**efore North Plains came to my school and informed me of their contest to earn a trip to Washington, D.C., the farthest I had been from home was Austin, Texas. Not only was my vacation to the nation's capital far away from my small hometown, it was a very educational experience, which made the parents smile, and it was fun, too.

It all began in Irving, the suburb in Dallas/Fort Worth, where the other fellow Texans, New Mexicans and I loaded the bus for the long bus ride. When I say long, I'm simply stating we traveled a long way. The bus ride did not seem long at all, with occasional napping, lots of television and visiting with my fellow peers. The bus rides were one of the highlights of the trip for me, because I had already made tons of friends from all the spare time I had to visit with people by the time we arrived in D.C.

We met at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in downtown D.C. with all the other state delegates, and traded collectible state pins that everyone had (might I add that Colorado girls are very friendly and pretty). Monday, June 17, was the beginning of our tour, and that morning all 1,400 kids from several different states were treated to the NRECA Youth-in-Action Meeting, where speakers from all around talked to us about different issues in the nation and what we can do to help. We even had the opportunity to discuss the problems in our own hometown and ask for suggestions. The Smithsonian followed; one can learn so much from this area and

gain so much pride for their country in just one day, and not even come close to viewing half of it. That evening we viewed an entertaining production of "Joseph's Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" as we all sat down and sipped excellent strawberry drinks.

My personal favorite was the FBI tour, which took place Tuesday, where I took in the sights and sounds of how the law enforcement agency works (the sights were the guns, the sounds were the gunshots; they were very loud). The Washington National Cathedral was a sight to behold, being the second largest church in the U.S.A. It reminded me of the impact God and religion have on our nation, especially in times like these. We also viewed the famous Sunset Parade at Iwo Jima, featuring an impressive drill team and marching band. Larry Combest is my local area congressman, and he made sure the other Youth Tour members and I had a full tour of the Capitol on Wednesday. That evening, all the state delegates were treated to a dinner/dance party where I danced, or, as some youth call it, "got my freak on."

Mount Vernon was a breathtaking experience for me, seeing the home of the amazing George Washington sent exciting chills down my spine. I never knew just how important the Navy was to America until I visited the Naval Museum and learned the history of the organization. After Thursday, I can now tell my kids I saw the White House, home of many presidents, the birth

of many new laws, bills and even some scandals. Thursday concluded with a visit to the Thomas Jefferson Memorial, where I realized just how important this founding father was to America.

I also realized at the FDR Memorial that Roosevelt was a pretty popular dude, serving three terms. On Friday, I witnessed the most beautiful and breathtaking wreath-laying ceremony ever at the amazing Arlington Cemetery, then got a sweet taste of urban life as I rode the metro to the Federal Triangle for lunch. After climbing the very high Washington Monument, we all went to the mall. Not that mall, the actual Mall, where we viewed the Lincoln Memorial, the Korean Memorial, and my personal favorite, the huge Vietnam Memorial, which includes names of thousands of people who fought and died for this country in just one war.

Saturday was a sad day, for we all realized we were nearing the end of our time together, leaving D.C. However, we all made the best of the final three days traveling to Dallas. All in all, this was definitely a memorable occasion I will never forget and will always cherish forever in my memories.

You heard it here first, D.C. is still a wonderful place full of patriotism and pride, even after September 11. Be aware though, a small copper penny at the bottom of your pocket can still set off those dreaded metal detectors. It was pretty embarrassing for me.

# NRECA Youth Tour

BY HEATHER MICKLEY

**W**ith our right hands placed over our hearts, we pledge allegiance to the United States. The pledge is simple enough. Anyone can recite the historic words, but does anyone really stop and appreciate their meaning and what they stand for?

The Youth Tour was an amazing experience from all angles. Not only were new lifetime friends and memories created; but also my eyes were opened. I began to realize what my country believes in, and what she is made of. While in Washington, D.C., I felt the true

spirit of our country.

This tour gives an indescribable feeling of hope and compassion for the future of our country. No everyday average tour can offer nearly as much. Laying the wreath at the founding father of our nation's home, and seeing the monuments to those who were willing to give their lives to protect that freedom only gave additional meaning to the Youth Tour. Without George Washington and so many others before us, there would be no Washington, D.C., or even United States of America.

On the tour a special emphasis was placed on the slogan "Let Freedom Ring." Standing between the Vietnam and Korean memorials I was moved to tears, as I saw all of the faceless names, realizing that these men and women were willing to protect my country and me. An incredibly true inscription at the Korean Memorial stated, "Freedom is not free." I now realize how special freedom is, and how special we, as citizens of the United States, must be to be allowed to live here where freedom does ring.

When I first saw the video, I

thought to myself, buses? Is it really even worth it? Three days traveling with 120 complete strangers (except for Ben) didn't sound like much fun to me. But to my surprise, the buses were one of the best parts of the trip. At an amazing speed we became attached to the bus drivers and the people on it. (Bus #1 rocks.)

Spending a day at the Capitol building was an indescribable feeling. For the majority of the morning and into the afternoon, we were able to watch the people who are responsible for keeping our country "on its toes." My representative is Mac Thornberry; he was an incredible person who did his best to describe his job requirements and answer questions about issues which affected us as youth. It is my goal to become a politician and visiting the Capitol gave me a small taste of what my future may be like, and the future looks promising and like lots of fun!

One of the high points was spending the afternoon at the Smithsonian Institution. My favorite museum was the Smithsonian National Art Museum. This museum contained the original and well-known portrait of the French General Napoleon Bonaparte.

The main highlight of the trip was the metro ride. My new friends and I had a complete blast hanging on for dear life while packed in a metro car like sardines, the only way to describe this experience would be ... well ... unique!

I would like to extend my sincerest gratitude to those who had a part in allowing me to experience this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. It is a special tour, which I will never forget.



Ben Williams and Heather Mickley take time out for a photo on the steps of the Capitol.