

Boys State Report

Jake Johnson

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Dear American Legion Post 46,

Thank you for sponsoring me to go to Boys State. It was incredible and I will remember the lessons I learned for a very long time. I'll try to give an overview of what we did and what I learned from it. There was so much packed into the week, but hopefully this captures it.

Upon arrival, I was directed to 1 of the 2 dorm buildings that delegates were staying in. Bob Knight, who had taught our online history lessons leading up to Boys State, was waiting outside to greet us in full historic costume. We went to our floor, which was designated by our assigned county. I was on floor 3, Army County. There were 2 wings of each floor which were assigned by city. I was assigned to Leonard Town. Our closest friendships were mainly within the city as we spent most of our time grouped together. We were given a bag that had our name tag, Boys State handbook, and 2 red polos to wear for the week. The name tags were either blue or yellow, which we learned more about later. After we were all unpacked, we met as a city to introduce ourselves. We proceeded to walk from the dorms to the FSU Tucker Center Basketball Arena. It was neat when we walked in and all the jumbotrons said Boys State on them. There were rows of tables set up and sorted by county and then city. We found our seats and got to work.

We spent most of the week in the Tucker Center, with activities ranging from history, legal, and legislative lectures to exams and some very captivating guest speakers. We got to hear from the Attorney General of Florida and the head of the state penitentiary system, along with others. An important part of the beginning of the week was the election of city, county, and state positions. We split off into cities on Sunday to elect our mayor. The mayor was responsible for role calls and enforcing wake up times throughout the week. After this, we elected other city positions. These were chief of police, laundryman, postmaster, and a few others. I was elected to be the postmaster, which meant I passed out letter writing materials and collected the letters to everyone's respective sponsoring American Legion post. The elections had an interesting format: All 500 of us remained in the arena, which meant that the process was quite loud. Anyone running for a position had 1 minute to deliver a speech, and then we voted. It was necessary to be able to project volume and speak confidently, which was new for some people. Coming up with a speech on the spot and projecting confidence are 2 things that I wasn't great at, but I improved both through the many elections. The counselors told us that even when you lose an election, keep running to get the most out of the week. I ran for at least 10 positions but ended up getting elected to 2. This aspect of Boys State was interesting, and I learned quite a bit about how I perform under pressure.

Once our county and city positions had been sorted out, we had several “simulations.” These were simulated issues that our city and county were faced with, which we were then tasked with solving. Our solution had to be in the form of a legislative bill. For example, at the county level we faced a weeks-long firestorm. I was in the transportation and public works committee. Consequently, we wrote a bill that created evacuation routes and allocated funds to road repair. These simulations were a valuable insight into what a city/county official’s job would look like.

On Wednesday, we learned that our yellow or blue name tags designated which political party we belonged to. Blue was the Nationalist party, yellow the Federalist. These were pretty much empty shells that served the purpose of splitting us half and half to learn how political parties work. I was a nationalist, so I attended the nationalist rallies. At these rallies, we elected our head of the party, our whip, and all of our executive branch candidates. Later that night, we voted using real ballots and booths for the executive positions. The governor ended up being a federalist, but we still landed some nationalist seats in the executive branch. In between the rally and the election, we elected our legislative positions. Because there were so many people, there were 4 legislative chambers instead of 2. I was a member of the forum, which was the senate’s “shadow chamber” as the dean of the legislative branch called it. Thursday was the first day that the legislature was in session. This is where I had the most fun and learned quite a bit. The forum started in the Capitol Building, specifically the Senate chamber. We ran the session just as the Senate does, utilizing proper parliamentary procedures. We got to use microphones and vote using the buttons at our individual seats. After lunch we moved to a committee meeting room to make room for the Boys State Senate. Over the course of our session, the forum passed around 18 bills, and had 8 of them pass in the Assembly and get signed into law by our governor Mike. We passed more than any other legislative chamber, and the dean of the legislative branch told us we were the best. Overall, the legislative aspect of Boys State was incredibly valuable. It taught me how to write bills, how to properly debate them, and the process that a bill takes from writing to being signed into law.

On Friday morning, many guest speakers came to tell us about the Service Academies. I learned about the many opportunities that they present. They had booths set up in the back of the arena where we could ask questions and pick up pamphlets with information. I am now considering applying to the USMMA and USCGA because of what I heard from these presenters.

Friday evening was the awards banquet and ceremony. The dining hall staff made a wonderful dinner. After this, scholarships and awards were presented. This was a great opportunity for parents to come see what we had been working on through the week. After the ceremony was finished, we were dismissed to go back to the dorms and pack. The bus ride back was quick since most of us were asleep after a big week.

Boys State taught me about how our government works, how our legislature runs, and how our political system functions. It gave me a good lesson on confidence and integrity as well. I have a stronger knowledge of what the American Legion stands for, and I learned the true definition of Americanism. I gained a deeper knowledge and respect for the efforts and sacrifices of our Veterans. I met many incredible people who will become incredible leaders, and they motivate me to do the same. Overall, I now see a brighter future for our state and country.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jake Johnson".