

Delegates report on experiences at Colorado Boys State

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

Each year, the American Legion selects young men who have just completed their junior year of high school to attend Colorado Boys State.

Held June 2-8 on the Colorado State University-Pueblo campus, this year's event was attended by Ryan Parker, Zach Roll and Tanner Smith.

The boys spent the week learning the ins-and-outs of American government while meeting and building friendships with hundreds of other delegates.

A report by each of the delegates follows:

By Ryan Parker

Boys State. Two words with many opportunities and challenges for a whole week. Throughout my week at CSU-Pueblo, I was told numerous times that "The people that got to go to Colorado Boys State were the best of the best and our future!" And I honestly didn't think I was that great.

On the first day when we registered, everybody figured out we would get two shirts for the whole week. Many people asked questions about how they would live a whole week with two identical shirts.

Once we got all of that settled, we were all running for our city positions. While everybody was talking about how they were number one in their class, and 4.0+ GPAs, I assumed that I wouldn't ever get the chance to be elected for any part of our city, but I actually ended up getting the position on the election commission.

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My role was to count up all of the votes with nine other younger men. I walked into my meeting with the rest of the election commissioners and suddenly got nervous, because I didn't know any of the guys in the room, and I knew that they would all take it very seriously. Each one of them was actually very nice and listened to everybody's opinion.

Due to the late registration of my roommate, I didn't meet him until 11 p.m. the first night. We talked and I had to explain to him where Holyoke was by telling him how close to Nebraska we are.

He was shocked because he went to school in a private school in Denver.

The second day rolled along, and that was when I realized how much time I spend outside, knowing that I wouldn't be able to even walk outside or do any physical activity until 6 that evening!

We woke up, ate breakfast, then had the flag ceremony, which is a huge part at Boys State, and everybody takes it very seriously!

That morning, at our general assembly, we learned how to write a bill, which interested me because we did it when I was hungry, and the lady speaking gave an example by using pizza, and how we would get a certain amount of pepperoni pizzas.

Many people took that seriously, and got into a huge argument, which I found amusing because it was 8 in the morning!

After the general assembly, we went into our counties and selected many positions. Since I was elected to the election commission, I was unable to run for anything.

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The day went on and finally, it was recreation time! I ended up playing basketball. I met up with Zach Roll and Tanner Smith. I figured we wouldn't be as good as some people because they played varsity on 4A and 5A teams. We were the only people that played for a 2A team there!

We all decided that we were probably the three best people there! It made us feel a lot better about ourselves, knowing that we played better than kids from bigger schools!

Then later that night, we retired the flags, then had our city meetings.

On the third day, it started being a routine, wake up, breakfast, flag ceremony, general assembly, retire flag, but then, we had our primary election that decided who the finalists would be for the final election.

With hard work from all the candidates, we narrowed it down to two people running for governor, two for lieutenant governor, and four for U.S. Senator. Then we had recreation time, where basketball was exactly the same.

There was something about the third day that I liked so much more than the first two days. Maybe because there were more people or I was finally getting to know everybody in my city! I honestly have no clue, but it was a blast!

Day four came along, and we did the same routine, then we had another vote. We had to narrow it down to one governor, one lieutenant governor, and two U.S. Senators in which the two U.S. Senators would go to Washington D.C. to represent Colorado!

During the recreation time, Zach and I ended up doing laundry because we both noticed we were running out of clean clothes, and even though we only had three days left of Boys State, we had to wash everything for our basketball camp following the week-long adventure.

We got to our city meeting, and we almost ended up impeaching our mayor because he wasn't

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exactly the nicest guy. He always yelled at everybody, and always put himself before everybody! But all of my city chickened out of it.

Day number five came up, very quickly! The whole week flew by and I was amazed with how much that I learned about our government!

I figured since I was in government class my junior year that I would know almost everything, and I ended up learning so much more about the United States of America!

On the fifth day we were in the senate. It was crazy how many bills there were that we needed to decide on, ranging from gun laws, to emergency bacon acts which called for an emergency bacon dispenser, two pieces for a quarter.

On the sixth day of Boys State my advisor gave me a speech in the morning which made all of us laugh a lot and started our day off on a good note!

We were back in the senate again, and we all decided that we needed to get many bills passed, because it would be our last day to work on them, and we only had about two or three done. We ended up passing many of the bills!

Later on in the day we all gathered together as the state legislature, and talked about all of our accomplishments that we had in that week, knowing it was our last day together and the day of the Boys State Graduation!

Many people went home right after the graduation, which led Zach, Tanner and me on a pop machine hunt, where we found the one outdoor pop machine on all of the campus, and probably the only one that worked.

While looking off a random building at CSU-Pueblo, a police officer came up and yelled, "You aren't planning on jumping, are you!?"

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And we said, “No, we are just taking a picture of this view because we don’t get this in northeastern Colorado!” So he went on his way. I looked at the railing where it said “Don’t die wondering,” which made us all understand why the officer came and talked to us!

The rest of the night went on with a vending machine problem. But a very funny night, where a guy showed Zach, Tanner and me his fishing pole he made with his pencil.

This was a great opportunity, and I believe that every guy should go if they can, because it is an excellent program and I really enjoyed every minute of it!

It went by super fast, but I was so glad that I went and got this once-in-a-lifetime deal, that many people can’t do! I want to thank the American Legion for allowing me to participate in Colorado Boys State, Laura and Jeff Roll for the ride up to Pueblo, my parents for the ride to Fort Collins and Rhonda and Marissa Smith for the rides around Fort Collins, and allowing us to stay in Marissa’s apartment!

By Zach Roll

Since going to Pueblo is a five-hour drive and check-in was at 8:30 a.m. on Sunday, Tanner Smith, Ryan Parker and I went up that Saturday to stay at my father’s aunt and uncle’s house to have our night of hanging out before we got separated into our cities the next day.

I remember Sunday morning in the check-in line that my two friends and I were cracking a lot of jokes, probably because we were so nervous and had no idea what to expect out of a week with 200-plus strangers. We heard many interesting things just in the check-in line, such as a veteran asking a student what the heck a Facebook is.

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When we got to the lobby, Tanner, Ryan and I were talking when out of nowhere we got our picture taken by one of the Boys State staff members. All three of us noticed, but decided to play it cool and act like we didn't notice.

After we had checked in, it was time to put our stuff in our rooms. I learned that day that my roommate was one of the quietest people on earth.

Thinking back, I hope I didn't keep my roommate awake, as he was in bed by 11 p.m. and I usually came in about 2 a.m. after watching movies in the lounge with my counselor and three other buddies, and yes, this was every night.

That Sunday night we had our city meetings in which we selected city officials such as mayor, police chief (me), fire chief, parks and recreation coordinator, city treasurer, city council, etc.

Some of these offices (treasurer) were elected via nose goes (if no one wanted the job, someone said nose goes, and whoever put their finger on their nose last got the job).

After the city meetings, it was about 10:30 p.m. and we were headed back to our dorms. The first night was the only night that I had gone to bed at the lights out time of 11. I would live to regret this.

Every morning, we would wake up at about 6:30 a.m. to go eat breakfast at the cafeteria. After breakfast, we would gather in the ballroom, which served as the meeting place for our general assemblies.

Day two was county day, so we got the pleasure of listening to a guest speaker, who is a county commissioner for El Paso County.

This is the day we elected our county officials. Each candidate running gave a 30-second speech. Some were very humorous and clever and others were very serious and intriguing.

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I believe this was also the day we broke into our party caucuses, where we elected a party chairman and decided on a party platform. I'm proud to say that for the Federalist Party we elected Luke Farquhar as our chairman, who we all referred to as Lord Farquard from the movie "Shrek." We learned that his low booming voice demanded respect, ran meetings efficiently and made for a hilarious, serious sense of humor every once in a while.

Once we got into the week, people ran for state office such as governor, lieutenant governor and two senator positions. Stories we heard from candidates were very diverse, and even outlandish at times. Everyone loved this campaign slogan, "Vote for me, it will be cool." After saying this, the candidate opened his full water bottle and poured it on his head. The room erupted in applause, but unfortunately this candidate lost.

It wasn't all jokes, though. We got to know the candidates personally during Q-and-A. What really mattered, was what the candidates stood up for and wanted to fight for.

I remember a kid named TJ Stokes, running for senator, and everyone agreed that he sounded like Abraham Lincoln: very serious, very honest and down to earth. He wasn't afraid to be honest in what he stood for. TJ ended up winning one senator position with the overwhelming win in the polls. Two senators were selected, and over 80 votes separated TJ from the second senator winner.

Now it gets interesting. Every position at every level has now been filled and then we broke into the House of Representatives and into the Senate where we discussed bills and whether they would pass or be shot down.

Bills ranged from emergency bacon acts and sending red heads to a treatment facility to teachers being trained to carry weapons in schools and drug testing of government officials.

We soon learned that, unless we got into physical confrontation, we were allowed to say whatever we felt, which made for a very real experience on what government is really like. We were truly running our own government without help from counselors or advisors at this point and it was truly rewarding. Discussions were heated then boring, to downright odd and hilarious.

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As far as the serious stuff goes, we all grew deeper in our appreciation for our armed forces and for our government. Great sacrifices must be made all the time for us to live the life we live. The flag ceremonies had a very real feeling to them, and all of it was so powerful.

The veterans told us many of their stories, which were all so vivid and detailed. We also learned the meaning behind our city names. They were named after missing Colorado native prisoners of war and those missing in action.

Learning the story of our city was gut wrenching, and it places in your heart so much respect. It places a duty in us to, in some way, serve this great country and to give this country the respect it deserves. We all had an overwhelming sense of respect and pride for the country we live in.

My favorite part of the trip was, really, all of it. I met new friends that I will continue to keep in touch with. The talent show was amazing, card tricks, singing, violin playing, a bagpipe stud, pianists, you name it, there was an incredible level of talent at this camp.

The most awesome feeling was when they played the song "Don't Stop Believing" by Journey, and all of Boys State became a choir and sang all together, which was truly amazing. That became our state song, which they played at the beginning of our slideshow at graduation.

It is such an honor that I completed the week at Boys State. It is one of the most rewarding experiences I have had. I met so many amazing men who have made an impact on everyone around them.

Staying up until 2 a.m. watching "Red Tails," to waking up early the next morning for a full day of work, all of it helped me ultimately become a better person and a better leader.

I want to thank my great-grandparents Eunice and Elton for giving me the idea of going to Boys State, and my parents for pushing me to follow through. I will always remember my week in Pueblo for Colorado Boys State.

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By Tanner Smith

On Saturday, June 1, I loaded my belongings and myself into the car and headed to Pueblo to attend the 2013 American Legion Boys State. I was somewhat apprehensive as to what lay ahead of me, not truly knowing what to expect out of my experience.

Keeping an open mind and positive attitude about the whole thing, I bravely ventured on into the unknown. What I discovered upon check-in the early morning of June 2, was a well-organized, lively, positive atmosphere.

Within a room filled with other high school juniors and a caring staff, I felt much more at ease and even a little excited as to what the week had in store for me.

I was assigned to Simpson City and my Boys State journey began. We were told our goal this week was to create the 51st state. Day one consisted of registration, a general assembly, our first city meeting, a retreat ceremony and another general assembly. More city meetings were held in which we formed parties and elected city officials such as the mayor, members of council, election commissioner and city treasurer.

We also appointed the fire chief, city clerk, parks and recreation commissioner, health officer and police chief. We had Boys State Citizen staff meetings and had a city meeting ... and that was just day one!

Day two was County Political Party Day. We learned about caucuses and divided into party caucuses by county.

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Our two party caucuses were the Nationalist and Federalist. I was part of the Federalist Party. We had general assemblies, learned about parliamentary procedure and merged into full county caucuses.

We also had our normal routine of the flag ceremony, citizen staff meetings and city meetings. Something new to our routine today was a recreation period, which was much needed, and talent show rehearsal.

Tuesday, day three was Primary Day. Today we had our normal routine of things and then our main focus of the day was the state party convention, a general assembly with a guest speaker, work on party platforms, primary elections, city counselors' meeting, citizen staff meeting and city meetings.

This was a day of lots of new things for me to learn about and understand!

Day four was our General Election Day and filled with campaigning and political party speeches. We divided into state party conventions in which the Nationalist candidates attended the Federalist Convention and the Federalist candidates attended the Nationalist Convention for an open question and answer session.

Then each returned to their respective parties for a general assembly and final speeches. We then had elections followed by our normal evening routine.

Thursday, day five was Legislation Day. After our normal morning routine, we divided into the Senate and House of Representatives. I was part of the House of Representatives.

Within these two we introduced, deliberated, debated and passed bills and laws. This day consisted of a lot of interesting and lively "conversations," often in the form of passionate yelling, arguing and name calling!

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It was quite the interesting day to be a part of, and I'm sure, very realistic to what actually goes on within our established Senate and House of Representatives when our members of legislature, senators and congressmen are trying to get their bills passed!

This was also a very tedious day with much argument and debate over small things, such as wording of a bill and the first, second and third reading of all bills. During all of this, we were reminded that "You started out as an eager but unacquainted group of young men to form the government of the 51st state. That government is now assembled and functioning. It is now necessary to create laws that will make the government a better and more realistic regulator of our society. So give it all your newfound abilities that make the 51st state what it is today, the American Legion Colorado Boys State."

After a much filled day, we also had our talent show, citizen staff meetings and city meetings.

Friday, day six was Graduation Day! By this time, our final morning routing of early breakfast, flag ceremony and general assembly were even more meaningful, because we all knew this would be our last time sharing it together.

After the general assembly, our morning was filled with more work within the Senate and House of Representatives in which we had to complete requirements of the 10 bills and have presentations of the resolutions.

The afternoon consisted of the joint session of state legislature and preparation for the graduation banquet. The banquet was really nice because all citizens formed up with their respective city and entered the banquet hall together, each city entering one at a time. At 10 p.m. we had our final city meetings.

Saturday, June 8, was our seventh and final day at Boys State. We had a citizens' breakfast and check-out.

Although exhausting, I learned a great deal from Boys State and valued the experience. Most of my learning came from the steps and processes of the way our government works, how to write

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and pass bills and laws, the official rules of parliamentary procedure and all about city, county and state caucuses.

It was also a very competitive atmosphere in that each city and party was lobbying for their own bills and laws to get passed. I am proud to say that my city of Simpson created the most bills and ran for the highest offices. I also learned more about flag etiquette and created lasting friendships.

Along with this huge learning process came a better understanding of our military and the American Legion. Because the program is run by our military veterans, I gained a new and inspired admiration for the veterans that have served our country.

Although some days became long, it was a great experience and I would highly recommend Boys State to future high school juniors.

It is an excellent, hands-on, fully immersed way to learn how our government works and what all is involved in creating a new state. It is also great, and my favorite part of the experience, is meeting new people and creating new friendships.

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