



Local high school students Bennett Neely and Olivia Larrison visited our nation's capital at the end of June to attend the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Youth to Washington Tour! "I got to learn about some of the nation's most important moments in history and got to see firsthand how parts of our government function," says Olivia, an incoming senior at Massac County High School.

These students got the chance to meet legislators who represent them and their home state of Illinois, ask questions and learn even more about topics related to electric cooperatives. In addition to meeting State Representative Mike Bost and U.S. Senator Dick Durbin, the students were able to visit historical sites, museums, memorials and many other significant destinations in and around Washington, D.C.: Arlington National Cemetery, George Washington's Mt. Vernon, Supreme Court, U.S. Capitol Building

and White House, just to name a few! Perhaps more than the sights and sounds of D.C., one of the biggest takeaways was the relationships formed by the students from various parts of the state, and even those from other states around the country. As Bennett Neely, another senior from Massac County stated, "I made friendships that I would not have had the opportunity to make. I'm so glad I was able to be a part of a trip that created lifelong memories!" This program, sponsored by NRECA, provides these students not only with the knowledge of the cooperative business model and principles, but gives them the opportunity to broaden their horizons, see the difference that legislation can make

in their own backyard, and in some cases, create aspirations that they thought weren't possible before experiencing Youth Tour. When asked what advice she had for future applicants, Olivia quickly said, "If any student is considering applying in the future, do it!"

If there is one common theme that each of the Illinois students had by the end of Youth Tour, it was one of resounding appreciation to NRECA and the individual cooperatives that sponsored them, but also a sense of pride within themselves for going out of their comfort zone and submitting an application, knowing it meant spending a week away from their friends, family, and summer activities, and travelling to a place most of them had never been. It was worth it, according to Bennett and Olivia – and the rest of the Illinois electric cooperative student representatives – to experience the Youth to Washington Tour!



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