Boys State and Girls State have a home at Nevada

The University of Nevada, Reno enjoys a long tradition of hosting the Nevada Boys State and Nevada Girls State programs each June, and this year marks the 65th anniversary for each. Boys State spends their week on the Nevada campus in Reno and Girls State takes place at the University’s Cooperative Extension 4-H Camp on the south shore of Lake Tahoe.

The Nevada branches of the American Legion and American Legion Auxiliary, respectively, proudly sponsor the programs to provide leadership opportunities to more than 250 delegates each year, representing high school juniors from all across Nevada.

Boys State and Girls State programs bring together Nevada’s brightest young leaders to participate in week-long, fast-paced, academic and leadership programs that simulate the state’s city, county and state government. Delegates are provided transportation from every corner of the state, as well as food, lodging and a slate of program activities. The delegates live together in their “city,” elect fellow delegates to represent them on all levels of government and hold their own legislative session at the end of the week with the delegates elected as state leaders, including governor, lieutenant governor and an elected Assembly and Senate.

Each program handles the partisan side of politics differently. For both programs, delegates are divided into two political parties—the Federalists and the Nationalists. For Boys State, delegates choose their political party based on their political leanings, Girls State and the parties write platforms and coordinate the state political campaigns for governor, lieutenant governor and other statewide offices. The candidates must raise money from their fellow delegates and craft campaigns including political ads and video spots. Girls State separates the delegates evenly into parties and the parties select their leadership and focus on moving legislation forward.

On the legislative side, each delegate writes a bill that is debated and decided upon by one of the eight legislative committees with the final top pieces of legislation going to the session’s elected State Assembly and State Senate. Throughout the week, delegates hear from lawmakers, elected officials and government personnel about their roles in the shaping of how our communities function. The week culminates in Carson City at the state Capitol where the delegates participate in a mock session of the legislature. Both the Assembly and Senate debate the top legislative bills for passage to the Governor.

The Nevada Legislature graciously provides the programs access to the Capitol for the entire day where the simulated elected senators and assemblymen take the seats of the actual legislators. Also, the Legislative Council Bureau helps guide the programs through the bill drafting process.

Through the decades, thousands of Nevadans have graduated from the Boys State and Girls State programs including many of the state’s brightest leaders. Boys State alumni include U.S. Senator Harry Reid, Governor Mike O’Callaghan, Governor Bob Miller, Assembly Majority Leader John Oceguera, Nevada Regent Mark Doubrava ‘89M.D. and Governor Brian Sandoval ’86. Girls State alumnas include former Nevada Secretary of State and Attorney General Frankie Sue Del Papa ’71, former First Lady of Nevada Sandy Miller and state Senator Valerie Wiener.

Many others have become leaders in their communities, businesses, churches, and local governments.

The support of the American Legion and American Legion Auxiliary, plus many businesses and individuals across the state, make these programs possible each year. A dedicated all-volunteer staff, comprised of program alumni, produces the week-long programs and commits hundreds of hours in the off-season to planning and preparation. Boys State and Girls State are always looking to connect with alumni and alumnas and can be found on Facebook and on the web at www.nevadaboysstate.org and www.nevadagirlsstate.net.

To learn more about supporting the Girls State and Boys State programs or the Nevada Boys State endowment, contact Lynda Buhlig ’84 at (775) 682-6013 or lbuhlig@unr.edu.

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