



## 2023 Students Inside Albany

The 2023 Students Inside Albany Conference had 60 attendees representing 35 local Leagues, MAL Units and ILO's. The students came from all over New York State from Long Island to Buffalo and Plattsburgh to Binghamton. They ranged from sophomores to seniors in high school. They were energetic and enthusiastic to learn about New York State government.

On Sunday evening, Erica Smitka, LWVNYS Legislative Director, presented information on how New York State Government works. She explained the roles of the various branches of New York State government and the differences between the state government and the other levels of government, e.g., national and local.

On Monday, the students toured the state Capitol and heard about whose faces are on those engraved stones and the secret of the fireplaces in the Senate Chambers. Back at the hotel, NY Assemblymembers Pat Fahy, John McDonald and Mary Beth Walsh talked with them about effective lobbying, how to approach legislators, make your arguments and be persuasive.

On the way to the Capitol that afternoon, the students had a tour of the Chambers of the Court of Appeals and heard about the different levels of the judiciary in New York State from Lisa LeCours, Chief Clerk and Legal Counsel, and Heather Davis, Deputy Clerk.

Continuing up the hill to the Capitol and Legislative Office Building, the students were directed to find their Assemblymember's offices and shadow their legislator. All of the students were escorted onto the Assembly floor and introduced on the floor of the Chamber. They viewed the legislators at their desks and the Chamber in session.

That evening, Maysoon Khan, Reporter, from the Associated Press, and Marie French, a Reporter with Politico, talked with the students with their coverage of state politics. They discussed how they decide what to cover, how to report quickly for social media sites and also how they started their careers in the media.

On Tuesday, Blair Horner, Executive Director of NYPIRG, and Jess Wisneski, Co-Executive Director of Citizen Action NY, presented information to the students on the methods they use to advocate for issues important to their organizations. These organizations reach the public in different ways from the League and use other techniques, such as rallies. Blair was also able to speak to the students about NYPIRG's involvement on college campuses, especially of interest to those students moving on to college next year.

The students shadowed their Senator on Tuesday. Unfortunately, the Senate was continuing their rules initiated during the pandemic, so the students were not allowed on to the floor of the Chamber, but watched session from the Gallery. Only the two students who shadowed the Senate Majority Leader were permitted to watch on the floor of the Chamber.

On Tuesday evening, David R. DeCancio, Bethlehem Town Board Member, and Meghan Keegan, Albany Common Council, Ward 9 Representative, spoke to the students about running for office. They outlined how to gather signatures for petitions, work with the parties, fundraise and participate in a candidate forum or debate. The students had many questions about the exact procedures and were encouraged to consider running for office at the local level.

On Wednesday morning, Jim Anderson, one of the chaperones and a seasoned-activist, engaged the students in a discussion of what they saw in the Assembly and Senate. Much of the discussion surrounded questions on procedures and voting in both Chambers and the role of leadership in each Chamber. The students were also presented individually with a certificate for attendance at the Conference. A few students noted that they had been offered internships in the legislators' offices for the summer.

Just for fun, the students also went bowling one night at a local bowling alley that provided laser lights, disco lights, black lights, and runway lights combined with the latest music videos on a giant screen.

Quotes from some of the students included:

"[After attending the program] I am now considering running for state office and lobbying for issues I deeply care about. [The program was] very inspiring and life changing. I learned so much." – *Student from Downstate New York*

"It's an immersive experience that you will not be able to find in any other program. It is a great source of empowerment for anybody that would like to drive change" - *Student from the Southern Tier of New York*

"This program made state government very tangible to me and forced me to leave my comfort zone to make new friends. I will keep these skills with me for my whole life." *Student from Downstate New York*

"Meeting so many inspirational leaders, my age and older, has motivated me even further, to pursue a career in government. We learned so much valuable information about our government and our role in it that you don't learn in school. [I met] so many passionate people and forge[d] unforgettable friendships" - *Student from Upstate New York*

"It was perfect!" - *Student from Western New York*

Thanks to all of our chaperones: Nancy Rosenthal (LWV of Albany), Ann Leiter (LWV of Central Nassau), Lori Robinson (LWV of Buffalo), and Jim Anderson (LWV of Buffalo). We couldn't host this program without the tremendous work and support of these volunteers!