



## 2018 Students Inside Albany

The 2018 Students Inside Albany Conference had 59 attendees representing 38 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. Because of the legislative calendar, this year's program was different than in years past.

On Sunday evening, Jennifer Wilson, 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, eg, national and local. She also discussed the leadership and management of the 2 legislative houses.

Because the Assembly was not in session on Monday, we organized a mock debate for the students in the Assembly. We surveyed them ahead of time and found that gun control/safety was their first topic of interest. On Sunday evening, Jennifer discussed some of the bills being considered in the legislature and the students chose to consider a repeal of the Safe Act and a bill concerning mental health issues related to gun access. A Speaker, Majority Leader and Clerk were all selected at random from the students. The students then broke into groups to prepare their debates and discussion on the bills.

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. They then went into the Assembly Chambers and took their seats. Russ Haven, NYPIRG General Counsel; Barbara Bartoletti, former LWVNYS Legislative Director; and Assemblymember John McDonald, assisted the students during the "session." The students followed legislative procedures and did a great job. Debate on the repeal of the Safe Act was so popular that we didn't have time to consider the second bill. The repeal failed 54 to 4 votes.

On Monday afternoon, League Legislative Director Jennifer Wilson provided the students with the do's and don'ts of lobbying the legislators – how to approach them, make your arguments and be persuasive. Also on Monday, Marina Marcou-O'Malley, Policy and Operations Director, Education Advocate, from the Alliance for Quality Education, presented information to the students on education issues and the methods they use to advocate for these issues. The topic was of particular interest to the students who asked many questions on financing education, Common Core and APPR. Liz Moran, Environmental Health Associate of Environmental Advocates of New York spoke as well, about their lobbying efforts to ensure clean air and water, especially in low income areas. She discussed the PFOA issue in Hoosick Falls, NY, as an example of their activism.

On Tuesday morning, 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 Gary Spencer, Public Information Officer of the Court. The students then continued on to the Capitol to watch the Assembly in session. Many Assemblymembers came to the back of the Chamber and met the students from their districts.

After lunch, the students watched the Assembly session for a short time before going to meet their Senators and staff in their offices. Usually, the students then accompany the Senators and/or staff to the floor or the Senate. The legislature had scheduled a joint session of the Senate and Assembly on Tuesday, however, to appoint the new Attorney General. This was a rare event – only held when a statewide officer needs to be appointed. The students were able to watch this joint session from the

floor or the gallery of the Assembly. Many students even were able to get a photo with the new Attorney General, Barbara Underwood.

After dinner on Tuesday, the students heard from a panel of media representatives: Rachel Silberstein of the Times Union, Dan Clark of PolitiFact, and Tim Williams of WCNY. The students asked insightful questions on sources, “fake news,” and also about careers in the media.

On Wednesday morning, Jennifer Wilson 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 especially related to the joint session. 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. The group also enjoyed dinner at a local Italian restaurant with free time at a recreational space in a local middle school.

Quotes from some of the students included:

- It’s life changing in the sense that you learn to listen and understand the opinions of others from all over even if they’re conflicting to your own.
- SIA provides an access to Albany that you can’t find anywhere else.
- You get a new perspective on state government and meet many cool people.
- I learned how to become an intern and try to encourage peers to be active, vote and take a stand.
- I learned how state government works which is something not taught in a conventional classroom setting.
- Awesome place to learn about state government, understand its relevance and think about career options that had never crossed my mind.
- Made me more passionate about politics and gave me confidence to get more involved.
- Incredibly informative with a great taste of activism and great connections.

Thanks to our chaperones: Carol Glansberg (LWV of Saratoga), Deb Cosher (LWV of Huntington), Betty Ann and Jim King (LWV of the North Country), Jennifer Wilson and Laura Ladd Bierman. Thanks also to our sponsor, CSEA.

