

Young Montanans tour nation's capital

Every June for the past 40 years, approximately 1,400 high school students from rural America have gathered in our nation's capital for the National Rural Electric Youth Tour. This year, Montana sent 27 students from 20 of Montana's electric cooperatives.

Comments by the Montana students following the trip included; "It was the experience of a lifetime!" "The tour helped me better understand events in our country's history." "It was one of the best times I have had in my young life!" and "The tour was awesome!"

The trip offers students an exceptional chance to learn about electric cooperatives and the nation's history. They also attended educational seminars and visited with Montana's Congressional Delegation. It is a tour mixed with learning and fun.

The students got to see many of the famous landmarks in and around Washington, D.C. including Mount Vernon, the Washington National Cathedral, the Vietnam Memorial, the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Monument and the nation's newest war memorial dedicated to World War II veterans.

The National Youth Day keynote speaker was Mike Schlappi, four-time Paralympic Medalist and two-time World Champion in Wheelchair Basketball. He is also president of his own company, Mike Schlappi Communications. Schlappi, an Eagle Scout, told the students to "Take responsibility for yourselves." and "Just because you can't stand up doesn't mean you can't stand out."

Other highlights of this year's tour included attending a matinee performance in the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, a visit to the Embassy of the Republic of the Philippines and a

guided tour of the nation's Capitol arranged by Senator Max Baucus' staff.

The group had breakfast with Representative Denny Rehberg and participated in question and answer sessions with Senator Baucus and Senator Conrad Burns. Youth Tour participant Coy Harwood of Browning, representing Glacier Electric Cooperative in Cut Bank, was elected Montana's Youth Leadership Council Representative. He will attend the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) Youth Leadership Conference in Washington, D.C. July 17-21. He will also assist NRECA staff during the Region IX Conference

in West Yellowstone September 28 and 29 and he will help with the NRECA Annual Meeting in San Diego, California February 23 – March 2. Harwood will address the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA) Annual Meeting in West Yellowstone September 30.

Montana chaperones for this year's Youth Tour were Rod Siring, manager of marketing and member services for Vigilante Electric Cooperative in Dillon, Debbie Kindle, cashier and billing clerk for Big Flat Electric Cooperative in Malta, and Sharon McDonald, program coordinator for MECA.



Montana's Youth to Washington Tour group gathers on the capitol steps.