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IN HER OWN WORDS: WILLOW DAMAR

2019 YOUTH TOUR | JUNE 15-20



tears. And it should. These are reminders of our past and a warning for our future.

Washington is not just monuments or memorials. It is also the place where real change is made; the center of our government. While

Thank you to Beltrami Electric for choosing me to represent our electric cooperative and the Minnesota Rural Electric Association during the 2019 Youth Tour. Washington, D.C., is home to some of the most important parts of our democracy, whether they be actual documents or historical landmarks. The most memorable parts of this trip are the ones I cannot put into words, such as the gratitude, respect and sadness that places such as Arlington National Cemetery conjure up. Looking out into what seems to be a never-ending sea of white gravestones puts into perspective the price we pay for freedom.

At the Vietnam War Memorial, thousands of flowers sat on the ground along a wall of names and faces. Little notes accompanied them, from brothers, sisters, children, friends and wives – childish scrawl addressed to “Grandpa,” all wishing the fallen and missing well-wishes and a happy Father’s Day. Each of those flowers is from someone – someone who misses someone.

The 9/11 Pentagon Memorial where each victim’s name corresponds to a year on the surrounding wall, the youngest from only 1998. A three-year-old girl, along with the rest of her family. A very beautiful place marked with tragedy. A place to sit, remember and reflect. The United States Holocaust Museum is the kind of place where you don’t feel comfortable breathing. In fact, you can’t breathe at all. There, a quote from Jewish playwright Bertolt Brecht stuck out to me:

“I know, of course; it’s simply luck. That I’ve survived so many friends. But last night in a dream I heard those friends say of me: ‘Survival of the fittest,’ and I hated myself.”

Guilt champions all emotions at the Holocaust Museum. It inspires a responsibility to prevent future tragedies. Stolen shoes, clothes and hair. The drawings of children sent to die in gas chambers. It moves even the toughest and most stoic to

in D.C, I had the opportunity to visit the White House and the Senate. Outside the White House, I met with protesters and asked them questions about their causes. One man outside was a part of the longest running protest in United States history. One other was a businessman who appeared to be on his lunch break, taking a short time to fight for a cause he believed in.

While inside the Senate building, I had the opportunity to meet with our senator, Tina Smith. We also had the opportunity to meet with representatives for Amy Klobuchar, Angie Craig, Pete Stauber and Collin Peterson. Everyone was genuinely interested in our questions and took the time to carefully answer them. Amy Klobuchar’s legislative assistant gave us passes to sit in on a Senate session. Watching lawmakers in action is quite awe-inspiring and is a hopeful sight for someone

like me, who one day wishes to be on that floor, making real change.

Overall, the 2019 Washington, D.C. Youth Tour has only increased my passion for politics and political change. I am beyond grateful for a taste of my (hopeful) future. Nothing I can say or do can really explain how much this trip has meant to me. I have had the opportunity to visit the



most important places and monuments in Washington, D.C, as well as being able to make new friends along the way who are just as passionate about politics as I am. Thank you.