



Local Students Experience the Trip of a Lifetime



THIS SUMMER, San Bernard Electric Cooperative was proud to send Payton Mathison and Aubrey Freytag of Hallettsville to Washington, D.C., as part of the 2025 Government-in-Action Youth Tour.

Along with 141 other students from across Texas, they spent a week exploring the nation's capital, forming lifelong friendships and learning about leadership, history and their local cooperative.

Beyond Expectations

For Mathison, a self-proclaimed "history nerd," the trip was anything but ordinary.

"I expected a strict, no-fun environment with early nights and little freedom. But oh boy, was I wrong," she said. "The friendships we built and the sights we experienced truly made this the trip of a lifetime."

Freytag agreed. "I thought I'd meet a few people and see some monuments, but the people I met became lifelong friends," she said. "We still text every day and even have plans to meet up again later this summer."

Both students shared stories of unforgettable experiences—some profound, others just plain fun. Mathison recalled an unexpected thunderstorm that left her and her friends sprinting back to the hotel in matching Youth Tour T-shirts, soaked head to toe. "That trip to dinner was 100% worth it," she said.

For Freytag, Capitol Hill day stood out the most.

"Touring the Capitol and meeting with congressional staff was incredible," she said. "Later, running through the pouring rain from the Library of Congress to our bus was a moment I'll never forget. I was drenched—but drenched in front of the Capitol of the United States and so grateful to be there."



Sights That Inspired

The week was filled with visits to iconic landmarks and museums. Mathison was most inspired by the Lincoln Memorial, calling it “perfect” after years of studying Abraham Lincoln in school.

Freytag was captivated by the National Archives Museum. “Seeing the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and even the Magna Carta made history come alive,” she said.

The Washington Monument and reflecting pool also left a powerful impression on Freytag. “The way the monument rises above everything else in D.C., almost as if it’s watching over the capital, really struck me,” she said.

Leadership and Patriotism

Youth Tour wasn’t just about sightseeing. Both students left with a deeper appreciation for government, leadership and civic involvement.

Freytag recalled Youth Night, where motivational speaker and gold medal-winning Paralympian Mike Schlappi inspired thousands of students. When a technical issue cut the sound system, the entire group spontaneously stood and sang the national anthem together.

“It was so moving,” Freytag said. “In a time when it can feel like patriotism is fading, that moment reminded me that love for our country is still alive.”

For Mathison, the trip even reshaped her career goals. Originally planning to pursue speech therapy, she changed course after meeting congressional staff during the trip. “I now plan to double major in agricultural communications and political science, with hopes of pursuing politics,” she said.

Apply Now

Mathison and Freytag encourage other students to apply. “If you’re a high school student, I could not recommend this trip enough. You’ll make some of the most impactful connections of your life,” Freytag said.

“This is more than just sightseeing,” Mathison said. “It’s inspiring, eye-opening and unforgettable.”

Applications for the 2026 Government-in-Action Youth Tour are online. SBEC will send three students this year. The deadline to apply is midnight January 19, 2026.

For more information, contact Tiffany Stodder at tstodder@sbec.org or call (979) 413-7681. ■



WIN A TRIP OF A LIFETIME

GOVERNMENT-IN-ACTION YOUTH TOUR

All Expense Paid Trip to Washington, D.C.



Youth Tour Dates
JUNE 14-21, 2026

Youth Tour Application Deadline
JANUARY 19, 2026



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