

## Students Inside Albany 2009

The 2009 Students Inside Albany Conference held April 19-22, is an intensive four day training experience designed to immerse students in the process by which public policy is proposed, enacted and changed in the New York State and how they can influence and affect this process.

Participating in this year's program were 27 very enthusiastic students ranging from grades 9-12, which included one foreign exchange student, one homeschooled student, and one student that is a distant relative of our founder, Carrie Chapman Catt. The 27 students came from 20 local Leagues (Albany, Buffalo/Niagara (2 *LeaderSpark*), Cazenovia, Columbia, Cooperstown, East Nassau, Geneva (1 *LeaderSpark*/1 *local League*), Great Neck, Huntington, Mid-Hudson, Port Washington/Manhasset, Rye/Rye Brook/Port Chester, Saugerties, Schenectady (2 *LeaderSpark*), Schuylar, Smithtown (2 *LeaderSpark*), Southwest Nassau, Steuben, Tompkins, Utica/Rome and 1 MAL Unit (Warren.)

While in Albany the students heard from a number of speakers including:

- Roman Hedges, Ph.D, Political Science, who introduced the "Basics of NYS Government"
- David Grandeau, former Executive Director of the New York State Lobby Commission, who asked the question: "Does the one man, one vote system work?"
- Robert Freeman, Executive Director for the Committee on Open Government, who explained why "Sunlight is the best disinfectant."
- Eileen Murphy, Deputy Director for Congressional Affairs for the Department of Environment Conservation, and Laura Haight, Senior Environmental Associate for New York Public Interest Group, worked together to give us the history of New York's Bottle Bill and the status of the recently passed new Bottle Bill.
- Barbara Bartoletti, Legislative Director for the LWVNYS, along with Blair Horner, Legislative Director for NYPIRG, and Russ Haven, Director for the Center for a Tobacco Free New York, spoke about "working as a coalition."
- Stephen Madarasz, Director of Communications for the Civil Service Employees Association, talked about the process to get many voices to speak as one, focusing on how to plan and execute a rally.
- Alan Lubin, Executive Vice-President of the New York State United Teachers discussed how one member's tragedy inspired NYSUT to successfully lobby a bill requiring an AED (*automated external defibrillator*) in every school.
- James T. Madore, Albany Bureau Chief from Newsday, highlighted a day in the life a reporter in Albany.
- John Conklin, Director of Public Information, and Robert Brehm, Deputy Director of Public Information for the New York State Board of Elections, along with Aimee Allaud, LWVNYS Elections Specialist, explained the importance of registering to vote.

In addition to the above speakers, all students toured the NYS Capitol and shadowed both their Assembly Member and Senator. They also were afforded the opportunity to attend an historic meeting of the Senate Bipartisan Commission on Rules Reform, which was followed by a Press Conference hosted by Senate Majority Leader Malcolm Smith.

Feedback received from the students included descriptions of a memorable event, both for the learning

experience and the opportunity to meet and interact with students across the state of New York. A few of the many quotes expressed by the students sum up the total experience:

- “I had a wonderful time learning about the government and meeting new people. The program was an experience I will never forget.”
- “I appreciate having had the opportunity to attend the recent SIA conference. It was once in a lifetime experience and I now have a better understanding of the workings of our state government.”
- “SIA gave me an insight into NYS government that is not normally available. I definitely didn’t think I had the power that I do to influence my government.”
- “SIA was a great opportunity to see firsthand the dynamics of Albany.”
- “I had a wonderful experience, an education that I could never get in the classroom.”
- “SIA made me want to become involved in government, definitely in the election process.”
- “I have always wanted to be active in my state government in the election process, and now I am even further inspired to reform Albany.”
- “I now understand the process more and how important it is for me to vote.”
- “I very much enjoyed the shadowing of my Assemblyman and Senator; this allowed me to directly see how the legislative body functioned.”
- “Everyone should be able to attend SIA, I feel that if they did more people would be involved in government.”
- “SIA has made me want to vote in every election, not just the big ones.”

*Students Inside Albany* exemplifies the Education Foundation’s goal of “empower through education.” These 27 students now possess the skills and knowledge required to be an active participant in the development of policy and laws in New York State and also an informed future voter.

Special thanks to our co-sponsors: CSEA, Golub Foundation, KeyBank, NYSUT, State Farm and Stewart’s Shops.

To learn more about LeaderSpark, please visit our website at: <http://lwvny.org/leaderSpark.html>.

**For more information on how to participate in either the LeaderSpark program or the Students Inside Albany conference please contact:**

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