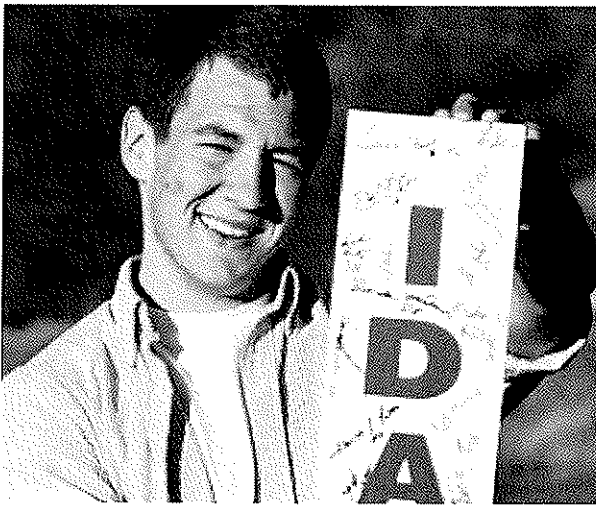


Lewiston teen finds out what makes D.C. tick

LHS senior Brian Perez travels to nation's capital as Boys Nation participant



Tribune/Steve Hanks

Brian Perez of Lewiston holds the Idaho sign he got when he attended the Boys Nation mock legislature in Washington, D.C.

By Kevin Gaboury of The Tribune The Lewiston Tribune | [0 comments](#)

Not many 17-year-olds can say they've shook the hand of the president of the United States, but Lewiston High School senior Brian Perez got to do just that.

"He was pretty chill," Perez said of President Barack Obama. "And tall."

When he wasn't rubbing elbows with the laid-back leader of the free world, Perez, 17, was touring the nation's capital and debating legislation as an Idaho senator for the 65th Boys Nation class. At the event, which is sponsored by the American Legion, young men from across the nation receive a hands-on education on the structure and function of the federal government. Perez is the second senator from Lewiston after Henry Funk was elected last year.

"One of the coolest parts was meeting somebody from every state," he said. "It was crazy ... like talking about immigration issues with a guy from Arizona."

But before being elected to Boys Nation, Perez and 200 other Idaho youth met in Boise early this summer for Boys State. He said he heard about the program from friends and

thought it would be an interesting experience. His older brother, Andy, also participated in the event.

"We all had to write bills in the proper congressional format," he said. "It was pretty tough."

On the last two days of Boys State, the young legislators debated their bills on the Senate floor of the Idaho State Capitol. Some of the bills were on serious issues, like abortion and gay marriage, while others were for fun.

"Mine, for instance, was requiring everyone to double-knot their shoes," Perez said. "It was more about making sure it was in the right format and arguing for it than the content. It was a lot of fun."

To be elected to Boys Nation, candidates needed to collect 25 signatures from their peers, then give a two-minute speech. After an open election, the top five candidates were interviewed and two were selected to travel to Washington, D.C. For Idaho, it was Perez and Dirk Stahlecker of Pocatello.

"It was amazing when they called my name," he said. "My parents were there for the graduation; it was really cool."

After arriving in D.C. in July, the 98 senators (two from every state except Alaska) were split into parties and given a platform.

"We all had bills, but these were national issues," he said. "We did the same thing, debating them using parliamentary procedure and electing positions and everything."

The bills this time around were "very heavy and well-written," he said, and included topics like immigration and abortion. He added it was interesting to hear about what issues were important to people from different regions.

"My roommate's was about legalizing marijuana," he said. "I debated a lot with him about that."

During the weeklong trip, the legislators-in-training also toured the district, visiting national monuments and museums, listening to influential speakers and shaking hands with lawmakers.

Perez will attend Brigham Young University in Utah next year and plans to go on a mission for his church the year after. For his major, he's considering either something in the medical field or engineering.

But despite his experience this summer, Perez doesn't think a future in politics is in the cards for him.

"I want to be more politically active, but I do not want to be a politician," he said with a chuckle. "There are other things that I'd rather do. I met some truly incredible guys, and I feel very confident that they should grow up to be politicians."

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