

What I Learned From Becoming The Governor of Texas Boys State

On the night of June 15th, in the Quad of UT Austin, nearly 1000 of the highest-achieving high school boys in the state of Texas stood still, awaiting in silence the announcement of the Texas Boys State Governor, the highest position offered in one of the nation's most rigorous civic engagement programs.

"And the 2023 Texas Boys State Governor is..."

The crowd fell into hushed anticipation.

"Federalist TG Barwa."

The crowd erupted in cheers as the friends I had made over the week celebrated with me, making me feel as though I had known them for years.

In June of this year, the 84th American Legion Texas Boys State gathered 850 top high school rising seniors at UT Austin for a week-long simulation of the Texas state government. The program is primarily run by the high schoolers, known as statesmen, with counselors working behind the scenes. Throughout the week, statesmen campaigned and delivered speeches for various elected positions, such as Mayor, District Judge, Attorney General, and Governor. They attended city, county, and state-level meetings, along with General Assemblies featuring guest speakers, including former CIA spies, CEOs, and veterans. The days were long, starting before 7 am and ending around 11 pm, with some statesmen staying up late in their rooms to work on their campaigns.

Texas Boys State was an intensive week-long program that pushed us to our limits, both physically and mentally, but the experience was undeniably transformative. It immersed us in the intricate world of state politics and civic engagement, offering a unique opportunity to gain firsthand insight into how our government operates. Living the life of politicians, we interacted with hundreds of diverse high school boys, each representing different regions and backgrounds across the state. This diversity proved invaluable as it allowed us to experience a wide range of perspectives, thereby broadening our understanding of the complex issues that affect our society.

One of the most crucial lessons we learned during this immersive experience was the importance of combating political polarization. The constant exposure to differing viewpoints compelled us to step out of our comfort zones and engage in constructive conversations with others who held opposing beliefs. It quickly became evident that understanding and compromising with others were vital skills to bridge divides and make progress on important issues.

Throughout the program, we were encouraged to listen to and respect each other's opinions, fostering an atmosphere of open dialogue and mutual understanding. Expressing our own values and voting on representatives gave us a sense of empowerment and responsibility. Moreover, the values of honesty and integrity were ingrained in every statesman throughout the week. During the program, there were charismatic candidates who lost because they didn't have much to say in terms of policy or beliefs. Additionally, I witnessed many intelligent statesmen lose races due to nervousness on stage caused by the pressure to secure the votes of the crowd. However, I also saw all of these individuals pick themselves back up and learn from their mistakes throughout the week. It was inspiring to observe people becoming more genuine and authentic, gaining confidence offstage, and subsequently becoming more comfortable on stage, understanding that Texas Boys State is a valuable learning experience. They recognized that every failure presented an opportunity for personal improvement. Throughout the week, it became apparent that being charismatic alone was not enough; substance and a genuine commitment to one's beliefs and constituents mattered greatly in achieving success. The experience taught us that true leadership stems from authenticity and a deep dedication to serving the people, rather than merely seeking popularity.

Spending a week with such intelligent and ambitious young people at Texas Boys State was truly rejuvenating, reigniting my faith and pride in this nation and its fundamental principles of liberty. Witnessing my peers engage in respectful discussions about various policy issues and matters affecting their communities and the country was genuinely inspiring.

Throughout our time at Texas Boys State, our counselors frequently emphasized one phrase: "our Boys State." This phrase served as a reminder that we had the freedom to

shape the program according to our own choices, encouraging independence and initiative in each of us. Embracing this sentiment, we all came to understand that as American citizens, Texas is our state, and America is our nation. This realization instilled in us a sense of ownership and responsibility, driving us to work together through conversation, compromise, patience, and passion to bring positive change to Texas and the entire nation.

The experience at Texas Boys State highlighted the unifying power of democracy through open dialogue and a willingness to find common ground. We learned that progress on important issues could be achieved through respectful conversations and a willingness to compromise on different viewpoints. Witnessing the potential of passionate and thoughtful young minds coming together to discuss, debate, and collaborate gave me confidence that the future of our nation is indeed in capable hands. Texas Boys State gave me hope that as long as our nation continues to produce bright and engaged young individuals like those I met at Texas Boys State, our great nation will undoubtedly continue to flourish.



Governor TG Barwa with Lieutenant General Stuart Risch, The Judge Advocate General, US Army