

Chris Joby gets comfortable at Gov. Henry McMaster's desk during a Cooperative Youth Summit visit to the Statehouse.

Krishna Dave received some higher learning from a lineman in the bucket of a boom truck during her visit to Newberry Electric Cooperative.

Finding new perspectives

FEC sends local students on summer learning trips

BY JOSH P. CROTZER

THE VIEW FROM the bucket of a utility truck looking out over a rural horizon certainly looks different than the view from the steps of the U.S. Capitol. Both, though, are places local high school students stood and gained new perspectives, along with peers from across the Palmetto State, on life-changing summer trips sponsored by Fairfield Electric and South Carolina's electric cooperatives.

Charlie Bonds of Winnsboro, Kinsely Price of Great Falls, Laney Funderburk of Richburg and Taylor Grant of Winnsboro were among the 57 South Carolina teens who traveled to the nation's capital in June through the co-ops' Washington Youth Tour. Harris McLean of Blythewood, Chris Joby of Elgin, Jonathan Bonds of Winnsboro and Krishna Dave of Elgin joined 41 other high school students for Cooperative Youth Summit in July in Columbia and Newberry.

During a six-day trip, the Washington Youth Tourists visited monuments, museums and memorials, including George Washington's Mount Vernon, which was a highlight for Charlie Bonds.

"So many impactful people stood in some of the same places



On Washington Youth Tour, Fairfield Electric's student delegates (from left) Charlie Bonds, Laney Funderburk, Kinsley Price and Grant Taylor went to the U.S. Capitol where they met with U.S. Sens. Lindsey Graham and Tim Scott.

While visiting the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Grant Taylor etches the name of a fellow Winnsboro native, Stephen Randolph Hilton, who was killed in the war in 1968. All the Washington Youth Tour students were given the biography and name panel location of a soldier from their area who is memorialized on the iconic wall.

that I got to stand," Bonds says of touring the historic home of the nation's first President.

In Columbia, Cooperative Youth Summit students embarked on a four-day exploration of their state government, civic engagement and the cooperative business model. In addition to a visit to the South Carolina Statehouse and Gov. Henry McMaster's office, they toured Newberry Electric Cooperative's headquarters, where many of them were lifted more than 100 feet in the air in a bucket truck. They also participated in a team competition in which they developed presentations arguing for and against current political and cultural issues such as banning TikTok and subsidizing electric vehicles.

"We were working with people we don't know, but by the end of it, we were good friends and supporting each other," says McLean. "The entire experience is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. You learn so much, and it's a ton of fun."