

Spotlight on Americanism /Boys State

Submitted by Father Gary Gummersheimer

It began in the early 1930's as the brain child of a lawyer, a teacher and a police officer from Chicago; seeking something to combat the fascist youth camps springing up in the United States. It came to fruition in 1935 at the fairgrounds in the state capital of Illinois, Springfield, where the very first session was held. This year it celebrates its 80th session; a program called by many a "week that can change a lifetime." We in the Legion family call it Boys State.

From its inception there was the desire to pass on to the youth of our Nation the importance of being a citizen who is involved in the political process, we call democracy. It was and still is very much a leadership forum in which the young men learn how to work for and with others to make government happen. It is a "learning by doing" experience.

It has had distinguished alumni such as President Bill Clinton and Governor Scott Walker of Wisconsin. But in many ways the most important alumni are those young men who go back home and get involved in strengthening the communities in which they live by becoming active in civic organizations and local government. Sharing what they learned of the importance of being actively involved, serving society.

How can you and your Squadron help? In many ways actually: You can assist your Post in securing funding to sponsor delegates to the program. You can speak to the school personnel in your area finding young men who would make good delegates to the program. You can search the rosters of your squadrons to see if one or more of your members are eligible to participate and encourage them to do so. You can check with the leadership of Boys State to see if you can volunteer to be on the staff. There is one Squadron in California where all of the members of the Squadron are or have been members of the staff of California Boys State. There are many States where the Sons of The American Legion are making important contributions to the planning and operation of their Boys State programs.

So, if you want to support one of the Pillars of The American Legion; the passing on of the importance of the gift we call Americanism, Boys State is the answer. It has been called by some the most important Legion family youth leadership program. If you want to help build a stronger America; if you want to help a young man experience a week that could change his life, then Boys State is what you want to be involved in; what you want make even stronger as enters its next eighty years of service to American youth.