

From Kenny Lake to the Nation's Capital; One Girl's Story



CVEA's Emmie Van Wyhe with Senator Lisa Murkowski, during her time as Murkowski's intern in Washington, D.C. this summer.

Photo courtesy Emmie Van Wyhe

In 2011, Emmie Van Wyhe was chosen to represent Copper Valley Electric Association at the Idaho Youth Rally, an electric industry youth leadership camp held annually in Caldwell, Idaho. While at the camp, Emmie's spirit shone bright and she was recognized for her outgoing personality, teamwork skills and leadership abilities, and was selected to represent not only CVEA but the entire state of Alaska, as a delegate on the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's Youth Leadership Council.

Her duties on the Council lasted two years and included attendance at the NRECA National Youth Tour in Washington, D.C. in 2012.

Emmie said that her Youth Rally and Youth Tour experiences were invaluable in helping her realize how important youth voices are in local, state, and national government; that it's important today's youth take every opportunity available to

learn how to be responsible leaders and decision-makers.

She now has the confidence to be herself around others and be proud of the place she comes from. She has also gained confidence when it comes to interacting in a professional manner with adults and in speaking authoritatively about issues that matter to her. According to Emmie, it was these experiences that helped prepare her for what was next to come; an internship with Senator Lisa Murkowski, in Washington, D.C.

Emmie actually first learned about the internship program when she had the opportunity to meet with Senator Murkowski at her office during the National Youth Tour.

While there, she also met and talked to previous interns who told her about their wonderful experience. She knew she had to at least try to get into the internship program, and she did just that.

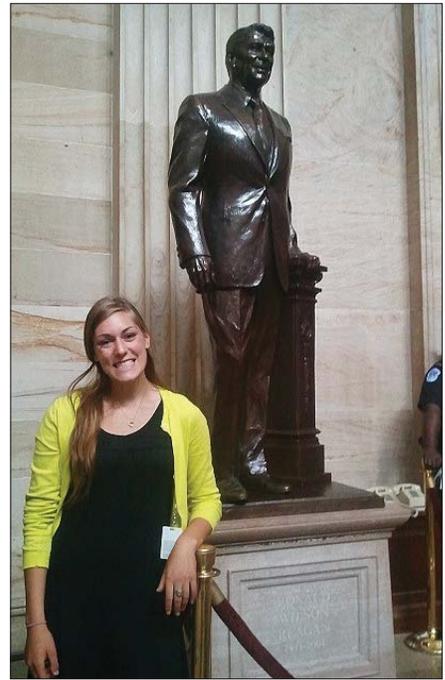
As an intern to Senator Murkowski, Emmie spent four weeks, throughout the month of July, in Washington, D.C. She did many different things including shadowing the Senator, auto-penning, delivering mail, giving Capitol tours, working in the front of Senator Murkowski's office, and working with the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, of which the Senator is the ranking member. She was able to help prepare for hearings, watch hearings, take notes, and write memos. Emmie was also able to take part in frequent events at the Capitol, including a 90th birthday celebration for retired Senator Bob Dole, and a celebration for Nelson Mandela.

When asked about some of her favorite parts of the internship, she commented that standing outside the Senate floor and brushing shoulders with Senators she'd seen on the news such as John McCain and Rand Paul was very surreal, as well as watching the news and seeing headlines for hearings she had actually been sitting in on.

She also very much enjoyed her shadow days where she got to sit behind Senator Murkowski in hearings, walk to the floor with her, and attend constituent meetings.

According to Emmie, it was a great opportunity to learn first-hand how the national government works and how changes to our Nation's laws and policies are made.

She found the amount of work that went on behind the scenes very interesting. Emmie commented, "Senators are expected to know so much about all of the topics and issues that are of interest to their constituents. The number of people that help and the hours and hours of work that go into



Above, the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C.

Above right, Emmie taking a break to smile for the camera during her internship for Senator Lisa Murkowski

Photo courtesy Emmy Van Wyhe

researching and learning all of the issues is amazing.”

When asked what one thing she experienced that was very different that she expected, Emmie said the hearings that she attended with the Senator. “They often go on and on for hours, with testimony from many different people. Some might say it’s a waste of time, but I thought it was a great example of how important each person’s voice is in what happens in our country. It was interesting to observe the amount of time and effort given to hearing perspectives from ordinary Americans.”

Emmie’s time in D.C. wasn’t all work; they also had time to play and explore. Emmie was able to tour the Pentagon and met with one of the curators of the Smithsonian’s Museum of Natural History. She also enjoyed touring the city, shopping the farmers market in Georgetown, attending her first professional baseball game, and taking a trip to Six Flags!

Although an amazing experience, Emmie said it was one of the most challenging. The long distance from home and very intense weather changes made it difficult and the amount of noise, traffic, and never-ending crowds of people were exhausting at times.

Other things pushed her so far out of her comfort zone, she wasn’t sure she would make it, but make it she did, and what she learned about herself in the process made the challenges worthwhile. According to Emmie, her time in D.C. helped her realize how grateful she is for the small community she lives in

and the beautiful place she calls home.

Next, Emmie is contemplating an internship with NRECA. Emmie believes that, “NRECA events and opportunities changed my life, and I would love to continue to be a part of their community. An internship with NRECA would help me better understand and contribute to the work that is currently being done, and provide me a greater understanding of how I can contribute to a brighter future for rural electric cooperatives across the country.”

Emmie is currently a freshman attending the University of Alaska Fairbanks as a Fisheries and Education major and a Political Science minor. Her interests are broad, but she has a love for Alaska’s natural resources and wants to make sure they remain healthy and abundant for all Alaskans.

Working as an intern definitely made Emmie more interested in government and she finds the prospect of becoming actively involved in state government very appealing; she says she could see herself possibly running for office in Alaska someday.

Join CVEA as we congratulate Emmie on her accomplishments; she has represented each of us well. We look forward to her continued success and wish her the best. ■

For information on the CVEA Community Foundation’s Youth Leadership Program, please contact Sharon Crisp at 822-5506, 835-7005, or email crisp@cvea.org.