



Newsletter From Rep. Matthew J. Shepherd

District 97

May 29, 2026

The Next Generation at the Capitol

This week, the Arkansas State Capitol belonged to the next generation.

Students from across our state gathered in Little Rock for Arkansas Boys State, Arkansas Girls State, and the Arkansas Civic Leadership Institute. For a few days, committee rooms, hallways, and the House floor were filled with young Arkansans learning firsthand how government works and, more importantly, how they can be a part of it.

They debated legislation, asked thoughtful questions, participated in mock sessions, and stepped behind the same microphones used by elected officials during the legislative session. Watching students from communities large and small confidently stand to speak, disagree respectfully, and work together was a reminder that Arkansas has an incredibly bright future.

Programs like these matter because they make government feel real and accessible. Civics is no longer just a chapter in a textbook when students are sitting in the House Chamber debating ideas themselves. Many current members of the Arkansas House and Senate once sat in those same seats as Boys State or Girls State participants. For some legislators, those programs helped spark an interest in public service that eventually led them to serve their communities at the Capitol. That is part of what makes these programs so meaningful. You never know which student walking through the Capitol today may someday return as a teacher, mayor, business leader, judge, or legislator.

The Arkansas Civic Leadership Institute carried a particularly meaningful mission this year. Created by members of the Arkansas House and Senate, the program ensured students who were unable to attend Girls State because of administrative issues still had an opportunity to experience leadership development and civic engagement at the Capitol. Their enthusiasm and participation made it clear just how valuable these opportunities are.

This week, the Capitol belonged to the next generation — and after watching these students lead, debate, and serve, it's clear Arkansas is in good hands.

