Two FFA'ers travel to Washington D.C. to learn and sightsee.

More than half of the United States population lives in poverty.

If you make more than $10,000 a year, you're considered wealthy.

That's what Gothenburg Future Farmers of America members Jessica Schmidt and Kylee Beyea said they remember most about their trip to Washington D.C. July 16 through July 21, for a Washington Leadership Conference (WLC).

The two members earned points through different FFA contests and activities to be selected for the trip.

"My sister said D.C. was a lot of fun when she went a few years ago so I was really wanting to go for myself," Beyea said.

Schmidt doesn't have an ag background so her motivation to join FFA was the leadership and community service aspect.

To learn more about poverty, all of the conference participants were split into groups. Both Schmidt and Beyea were put into a lower class group.

There were groups also representing the upper and middle classes which had fewer people

than the lower class, Schmidt said.

The lower class, or poverty group, was given a single bowl of rice that was shared, Schmidt said.

Although it was only a small representation of poverty in the United States, both Schmidt and Beyea said that was an eye-opening moment.

“I was definitely humbled,” Schmidt said.

Beyea added that she didn’t realize the poverty situation in the United States was that bad.

After dinner, the groups came together and talked about different service projects that could change poverty statistics, Schmidt said.

On another day, the group of 300 experienced the Newseum, (a news museum). They also toured the monuments and Arlington Cemetery.

“The monuments were bigger than I thought they would be,” Beyea said.

Both Schmidt and Beyea said that the Arlington cemetery was peaceful.

Another highlight was meeting with U.S. Senator Deb Fischer.

“We talked with her and learned a little about what she does,” Schmidt said. “I was surprised by how much she does and how many people she has doing things for her.”

At the end of the week, FFA'ers participated in a large service project.

They packaged up trunks full of stickers, pens and calculators for schools in the D.C. area.

Both Schmidt and Beyea have service projects of their own in the Gothenburg community.

Schmidt overseas a community garden. She took it over after FFA member Morgan Kowaleski graduated. Produce from the garden is sold at the local farmer's market.

Beyea said she isn't tied down to one project because she feels there are many little things she can do for a big cause, such as Meals on Wheels, cleaning up trash and serving at FFA dinners.

"While at the WLC, I learned that being one person who does something can mean a big deal," she said.

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