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Cherry Creek senior gains new appreciation for Constitution

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Cherry Creek High School senior Sarah Brown, second from right, joined Colorado students Marguerite Rose, Rory O'Brien, Hannah Fritz, Jaime Jackson and William Peterson for the Constitutional Academy in Washington, D.C. The annual academy teaches students from across the United States about the history, importance and application of the U.S. Constitution. Photo courtesy of the Bill of Rights Institute

By Peter Jones

Sarah Brown was a fly on the wall at [Congress](#) – at least in the hallways and cafeteria – during part of the recent rancor over raising the federal debt ceiling.

“You could tell there was quite some hustle going on,” she said. “I’m not sure if that’s how it normally is or if it was because of the debt-ceiling crisis.”

Brown, 17, was one of 42 high school students from across the United States who participated in this year’s Constitutional Academy, a six-week immersion into the history, interpretation and contemporary application of the U.S. Constitution.

The course culminates with a week in Washington, D.C., where students tour historic landmarks, sift through government archives, meet with members of Congress and potentially witness application of the Constitution in real time.

This year, the fight over the debt ceiling was the backdrop.

“When I got back home, I figured out that nothing had really happened. It was a little disappointing,” Brown said.

The Cherry Creek High School senior joined five other Colorado teenagers in this year’s Constitutional Academy. The local scholarships were provided by the Daniels Fund, a foundation created by the late Colorado cable-television pioneer Bill Daniels.

The annual Constitutional Academy is a project of the [Bill of Rights Institute](#), a national nonprofit educational organization founded by billionaire and libertarian philanthropist [Charles Koch](#).

According to Bill of Rights spokeswoman Rachel Gillespie, the institute, based in Arlington, Va., provides a nonpartisan education in the history and importance of the Constitution.

“Our mission is to educate young people about the words and ideas of the founders,” she said of the organization, which produces instructional materials and conducts year-round programs for teachers and students across the country.

Before embarking on their trip to the capital, the 43 students in this year’s Constitutional Academy spent more than a month on research that included reading primary-source documents and conducting online discussions with constitutional scholars.

The academy culminated two weeks ago when students came to Washington for a week of first-hand experience, including meeting members of Congress, touring historical sites and discussing politics and constitutional issues with each other.

“We didn’t necessarily believe the same things, but we all wanted to think about the Constitution and we all wanted to learn about it,” Brown said.

She said the academy helped her gain new appreciation for the continuing importance of one of the nation’s oldest documents.

“I wouldn’t say I was blasé about the Constitution before, but I felt like we needed to look forward,” she said. “I learned how relevant it is to us today and we really need to appreciate what the founding fathers wrote down for us.”

The [Cherry Creek](#) student says the most exciting part of the trip was discovering there were other young people who cared about the Constitution and the future of the United States.

“I’d never met such an interesting group of kids from around the country,” Brown said. “It made me feel hopeful as we were sitting at dinner telling each other our stories about what we learned.”