

Academy-bound students honored (The News Journal)

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WASHINGTON -- Buzz cuts, "yes, sirs" and intense work schedules are just around the corner for 16 Delaware students bound for U.S. service academies.

But on June 11, 11 of those future military leaders and their families got four-star treatment at the U.S. Capitol with a reception, photos with Delaware's three congressional lawmakers who nominated them and a tour of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee room, courtesy of its chairman, Sen. Joe Biden.

"The one thing you can be sure of is you are the cream of the crop," said the Delaware democrat, who along with Democratic Sen. Tom Carper spent nearly an hour with the group. Rep. Mike Castle, R-Del., also appeared between House votes.

Cream of the crop, indeed. Take William Hanley, 18, a St. Thomas More Academy graduate from Lewes. Three service academies accepted him, something that happens only occasionally, according to Carper's office.

"We called it the triple crown," said his father Joe, himself a Naval Reserve commander returned a year ago from Iraq.

Hanley, who picked the Naval Academy in Annapolis, considered the Capitol reception "very gratifying."

"I didn't think they'd spend that much time with us," said Hanley, who is considering studying medicine.

During the tour, Biden detailed the history of the room where the Treaty of Versailles and World War II's declaration were debated and where Vietnam War critic Sen. William Fulbright once sat at the head of the table as chairman.

Biden regaled the group with his own calamitous first experience as a first-term, 30-year-old senator in that room, where former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger mistook him for a staffer when he arrived late after waiting in the wrong room.

Now the chairman, Biden told the group "this place still does work" and said their attendance at the academies will help protect the country.

"Overwhelmed" was how Rory Rogan, who is bound for the Merchant Marine Academy, described himself after the tour.

"Senator [Barack] Obama has a seat over there," said the Lewes 18-year-old, pointing to the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee's chair. "The significance of this room, you can't really fathom."

William Rogers of Wilmington, who went to the Delaware Military Academy and will attend the Naval Academy, said it was "definitely an experience I've never had before."

"It was pretty inspiring," he said.