



KYM SMITH

Benjamin Newie-Mene and Charlotte Blackman meet Prime Minister Scott Morrison

Students meet the man in charge



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Benjamin “Benji” Newie-Mene will begin his Year 12 exams in a few weeks but on Tuesday he received a crash course in federal politics and was allowed into the inner sanctum of Parliament House—Scott Morrison’s office.

The 17-year-old comes from the remote Torres Strait community of St Pauls on Moa Island and has never really been into politics but was left speechless after chatting with the Prime Minister about

his future and rugby league and taking selfies.

“It was great. I’m lost for words,” Benji said.

“We came through seeing them argue in question time and to come here (to Mr Morrison’s office) and he’s so happy. I felt pretty comfortable actually. It drives me a bit more to get to my goals.”

Benji is an Australian Indigenous Education Foundation scholarship student who goes to Marist College Ashgrove in Brisbane. He wants to join the navy.

“My great grandfather was in the army in WWII and kind of gave me inspiration since I was little. All my uncles and my grandfather used to tell me stories about how he went off and came back,” Benji said.

The high school student was

one of about 70 high performing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Canberra this week to learn about careers in the government.

They have met MPs from both sides, including Indigenous Australians Minister Ken Wyatt and his Labor counterpart Linda Burney, and will visit the Australian Defence Force Academy, the Australian Federal Police headquarters and national institutions like parliament and the Australian War Memorial.

Fellow AIEF student Charlotte Blackman, who is in Year 11 at Ipswich Girls’ Grammar School and comes from Charleville in Queensland, said she would use the week to learn more about her culture: “Charleville is a good town, I will admit that. But there’s

not a lot of opportunities. You only get store jobs. When I came to Ipswich Girls Grammar, it really opened a lot of doors for me. I wouldn’t have thought about nursing five years ago.”

The aspiring nurse was particularly taken by her visit to the Tent Embassy outside parliament and found Mr Morrison, who told Charlotte his wife was also a nurse, “humble” and easy to talk to.

AIEF executive director Andrew Penfold said more than 40 per cent of students on scholarships were from remote communities and the foundation was committed to supporting them to develop skills and confidence.

Mr Morrison had a message for Benji and Charlotte as they left his office: “There’s only one person who stands in your way—you.”