

## Students act out a global crisis at Reagan Library

Michele Willer-Allred, Special to The Star 2:02 p.m. PDT October 16, 2016



*Simi Valley High School student Spencer Lueck, acting as the secretary of the Treasury, gives a news conference as he and other students from the school take part in "The Situation Room Experience." ROB VARELA/THE STAR*

A global crisis was unfolding in real time: The president of the United States had been shot, chaos was ensuing — and it was up to 28 Simi Valley High School students to take command of the situation.

"The president is stable," announced Megan Fukunaga, suddenly thrust into the role of deputy press secretary. "We do not know who the shooter is at this time."

Megan and the other students in Steven Caswell's entrepreneurship and marketing class at Simi Valley High recently visited the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum, where each took on a role during a fictional 75-minute foreign-policy scenario inside "The Situation Room Experience."

The \$1.5 million interactive exhibit for high school and college students opened Sept. 29 at the Reagan Library, the culmination of four years of planning. Designed by a team of teachers, university professors and administrators, technology designers and writers, it places students on the White House crisis management team or in the media pool.



*Playing the roles of high-level officials in the government, Simi Valley High School students take part in "The Situation Room Experience" at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum in Simi Valley. The \$1.5 million interactive exhibit for high school and college students opened Sep. 29. Designed by a team of teachers, university professors and administrators, technology designers and writers, it places students on the White House crisis management team or in the media pool. ROB VARELA/THE STAR*

Mira Cohen, director of education at the Reagan Library, said the exhibit is designed to challenge students to think on their feet and make split-second decisions that could mean success or failure during an international crisis.

Students are provided with an electronic tablet that outlines their unique role and provides them with critical real-time information that drives their experience.

They work in the actual White House Situation Room Command Center, where every president from John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush had to make some of their

most difficult decisions, often as a matter of life and death. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, then-President Bush determined the Situation Room complex needed a technology update and renovation. In 2007, the conference room and command center were crated up and taken to the Reagan Library. Part of the complex also went to the George W. Bush Presidential Library in Texas.

"The Situation Room Experience" is open to schools at no charge. It includes more than 450 pages of original content, more than three dozen roles and more than three hours of original videos to create a realistic, live-news experience. In fact, the assassination-attempt storyline was based on John Hinckley's attempt to kill President Reagan in 1981.

During their visit, the students also had to handle a stock market crash and a Ukrainian border situation with Russia.

While some of the students served as White House staff members managing the government, others took on roles of reporters scrambling to accurately cover the crisis as it unfolded. Their reporting, accurate or not, influenced the outcome of the scenario.

"I thought it was a great learning experience, but also quite stressful," said Noah Neuschotz, 16, who played the role of attorney general. "I can't imagine making those decisions and dealing with the press in real life."

Caiden Silver, 14, who played a Secret Service agent, said he learned the power of decision-making, right or wrong.

"I thought it was a lot of fun and exciting making definitive decisions, but making mistakes was kind of fun, too — seeing what those could potentially do in real life," he said.

Caswell said the exhibit was good for business students, especially for those who may experience a crisis when starting their own business and who would need to think quickly on their feet.

"It's very exciting," he said. "I'm sure the students will be talking about their experience for a long time."

For more information on "The Situation Room Experience," visit [www.situationroom.archives.gov](http://www.situationroom.archives.gov).