

Student Congress Overview

Student Congress is a fun and challenging opportunity to develop debate skills in a large group setting, often defined as an individual debate in the context of a large group. It is an activity for both new and experienced debaters. New debaters can use it to "get their feet wet" in a non-threatening setting. Experienced students can use it to hone their skills of presenting evidence in a concise, yet persuasive way along with strengthening their logic and argumentation skills.

In Student Congress, students are legislators in a mock Congress setting where they will acquire a basic knowledge of parliamentary procedure, the standard protocol of legislative bodies. This event also allows students to develop their knowledge of and ability in speaking, in logic and presentation skills. It also helps students become well versed in current events.

Student Congress teaches and trains students in the basic procedures by which governmental bodies within a Republic operate whether a City Council, County Commission, State Legislature or the US House of Representatives and Senate. It is an exercise in applied Civics.

Preparation for a Congress Session

Prior to the actual Congress sessions, students have the opportunity to research and write pieces of legislation, both bills and resolutions, about issues they are interested in and about which they would like to have discussed and debated; issues they feel will better the society in which we live, just like our state and US Senators and Representatives. At a tournament, debaters will then speak on the legislation while using proper parliamentary procedure.

The bills and resolutions written by the students are vetted, usually by the Tournament Director, and are preselected for each session. Thus, the Calendar for each session is established. The Docket, which are the bills for the entire Congress tournament, are published and distributed to the students usually two weeks before the event.

To debate and discuss the bills and resolutions, students will need to review them, determine their position on the issues involved, study the issues, and then find, prepare, and bring evidence to support both a Pro and Con position. The reason it is helpful to gather evidence on both sides of an issue presented in a bill or resolution is so you can have the opportunity to speak regarding bills or resolutions that are heavily supported on the opposite side of the issue. Students use parliamentary procedure to make motions and propose amendments, as they debate, clarifying their position and advocating for or against the bills, amendments, and resolutions.

Judges score each competitor based on argumentation ability (organization, content, logic, and documented support), speaking technique (oral and physical presentation and style), knowledge of parliamentary procedure, and overall participation. In each session of Congress, one student will act as the Presiding Officer directing the discussion, debate and voting in the Chamber. Robert's Rules of Order is the definitive book on parliamentary procedure.