

A Weekend to Remember: Junior Statesmen of America

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We might seem like a dysfunctional group gaveling, shouting, arguing and laughing, but we're surrounded by each other's passion. I am talking about Junior Statesmen of America (JSA). JSA is a national organization organized at the local chapter level in high school campuses around the country for students interested in politics, government, foreign affairs, law and current news. These chapters collectively form regions and run multiple regional events annually. JSA allows for an exchange of ideas through stimulating student debates, thought talks, problem solving, and a variety of simulations, like Mock Supreme Court.

On the last weekend of February, the six members of the Ashland High JSA Club made the 8-hour journey on Amtrak from Boston to Washington D.C. for the Northeastern Winter Congress held at the Crystal City DoubleTree Hotel. The passionate debaters who went on the trip were Kwesi Sakyi, Jordan Castro, Dean Fantaci, Preston Saleh, Pradeep Manivannan, and myself (Neha Shabeer) chaperoned by the great Mr. Len Rabinowitz. We checked into the hotel on Friday afternoon after taking two subways from Union Station and making our way through the windy streets of D.C. with our suitcases. I was

blessed with my own hotel room since I was the only girl on the trip. Later, the boys and I went out for dinner and attended the opening ceremony, which included the keynote speaker, Republican Senator of Nebraska, Benjamin Sasse. After a powerful speech, we split between the Democratic and Republican parties, as the convention was structured like a mock Congress. Our club was surprisingly split down the middle, half Democrats and half Republicans. In the Democratic caucus, we went over the bills we would be debating in the House and Senate the next day.

Once the caucus rounded up, it was time for what everyone had been waiting for—the dance. JSA parties are quite epic with killer-dance circles, some incredible flash mobs and a great chance to meet other like-minded students from other schools. The theme for the first dance of the weekend was Blackout so everyone was wearing black. By the end of the night, my feet were sore and I felt thankful to hit the white hotel linens before the next day of events started.

We all woke up bright and early to get ready in our best business attire, boys in suits and girls in dresses or skirts and blouses with heels. (Side note: To whomever invented heels, women's feet do not taper into a triangular point. The pointiest shoe does not make one look any better, it just makes you waddle from constricted blood flow to your toes.) However, back



Ashland students bid farewell to the JSA Northeastern Winter Congress: (l-r) Preston Saleh, Mr. Len Rabinowitz, Pradeep Manivannan, Neha Shabeer, Jordan Castro and Kwesi Sakyi at the Crystal City DoubleTree in Washington, D.C. (Photo/submitted)

to the convention. After a speedy breakfast at the hotel, we went on our separate ways to our respective Democratic or Republican Houses or Senates to debate a set of bills, amendments and resolutions. Bills are proposed by local chapters and the main pro speaker is the sponsor/writer of the bill, while main con and subsequents are impromptu. If a bill is passed by the House, it is sent to Senate, which can pass or fail it. Now that the layout is understood, let's proceed to House G where Kwesi and I spent the majority of the day. Attendance was recorded and then our committee was called to order. Throughout the day, we debated 12 bills. A few of my favorite bills debated were:

"A BILL TO MANDATE WOMEN IN THE DRAFT"

"A BILL TO MANDATE TEACHING OF COMPUTER SCIENCE IN ALL PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS."

"A BILL TO LIMIT THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN A MOTHER ON WELFARE CAN HAVE"

"A BILL TO MAKE AMERICA GAY AGAIN," my all-time favorite mock bill of the century. The bill proposed to take the entire military budget (~\$700 billion) and make Hawaii the international gay party islands where all gays could voluntarily move to party all day and night and never work. Straight people would only be able to visit for two weeks at a time on a "straight visa," with an exception of Macklemore as he is the savior of the gays. There were

making stronger friendships full of memories and learning from other youth from across the country. I believe that with this generation of youth passionate about politics, we *will* be able to make America great again. Youth getting involved in politics is critical as they have different perspectives and host of different ideas. Allowing youth to voice their opinion is not only good for society but necessary for society. Our Superintendent Jim Adams is a great example of getting youth involved in school policy decisions and allowing us to know what happens behind the scenes to make Ashland a great community.

To help Ashland JSA keep running and to subsidize the costs for JSA members who cannot afford to attend these great events that occur six times a year, please consider donating. Email ashlandjsa@gmail.com, if you are interested, since no donation is too small. Also, keep your eye out for collection boxes at local restaurants and businesses around town. Thank you and we thoroughly appreciate your support to keep our club alive and thriving!

A huge thank you to our club supervisor, Mr. Len Rabinowitz, and Principal St. Coeur, plus a shoutout to all the other members of JSA who couldn't make it to the convention! For more about the happenings at Ashland High School through my eyes, keep reading my monthly column :)

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