

Student Congress Tips

General Information

Student Congress is exactly what it sounds like; it is an event in which each school provides legislation which the competitors will debate and vote on. Competitors can speak for or against any piece of legislation and are scored on a scale from 1-6 (six being the best). A presiding officer who has been elected by the Congress is in charge of keeping order, recognizing speakers, and moving smoothly down the agenda. The rules of Student Congress follow basic parliamentary procedure. Congress is not as politicized as it may appear, but because other students are voting for you, keep in mind that it is important for you to make impression on everyone.

Suggestions

- Make sure you receive a table of parliamentary procedure and motions from your coach. Become familiar with the table as it explains the rules of congress.
- Your school should receive a package of legislation at least one week before congress. Make sure that you receive a copy of each bill/resolution and bring them with you to Congress for reference.
- Speeches cannot exceed 3 minutes. Filling up the complete time allotted to you is your best decision: the more analysis you provide, the more intelligent you appear.
- Avoid playing parliamentary games or making unnecessary motions. This takes away time from speeches and will annoy other members of the Congress, the presiding officer, the parliamentarian, and the scorer(s).
- Be involved: be the first one to make a motion *when it is necessary*. Ask intelligent questions. Speak as early in the session as you can and speak continuously throughout the session.
- Be friendly to all members of your house; they are the people who will elect you to be the presiding officer, outstanding representative/senator, or to attend nationals. Ask intelligent questions which expose weaknesses in a speech, but do not humiliate an obviously frightened and faltering speaker. Do not, however, "play politics." A fake disposition or overtly plotting to attract people's votes will only annoy other members of the chamber.
- Prepare beforehand. Include evidence in your speeches. Have outlines ready for both sides of each piece of legislation to increase the likelihood that you will get to speak. Also be prepared to think on your feet. After the first three or four speeches on a bill/resolution, start refuting things previous speakers have said rather than echoing the same analysis the scorer has just heard. Bring your research with you so that you can add quotes to these speeches as well.
- Support your teammates. Ask them a friendly question if they are struggling during their cross-examination period. If you have qualified for nationals in another event or do not want to go to Congress nationals, work to convince other representatives to vote for one of your teammates. Refute the speeches of your teammates' strongest opponents. Push for your school's legislation to come out of the committee first.

- If you are trying to qualify for nationals, write a highly debatable but reasonable piece of legislation. This will put you in the spotlight and give other representatives a favorable impression of you before you even begin.
- *Always* politely speak up if you have precedence (meaning that it is your turn to speak because you have given fewer speeches than the speaker who has been recognized).

If You Want to Preside...

- Know the risks. A good job as PO can elevate you in the opinion of other representatives and increase your chances of going to states or nationals; however, a poor job will destroy your hopes and goals.
- Memorize the table of parliamentary procedure so that you will know how many votes it takes to pass each motion and what each motion accomplishes.
- Promptly discourage disruptive behavior or the entire house will be motivated to behave poorly.
- Learn to keep a precedence chart. This means you must keep track of the number of speeches each representative has given. A representative with only 1 speech will get to speak before a representative with 2 or more, and so on.
- Do not show favoritism to your teammates or friends. This will damage your score and harm your chances of attending nationals.

Source: www.angelfire.com