Student Congress

Student Congress is mock legislative debate patterned after our government's congress. Using parliamentary procedure, students debate and vote upon bills and resolutions regarding state, national and international problems. The bills and resolutions are published 2-4 weeks before the tournament, to allow students time to research the topics and prepare speeches. Students decide whether to speak in the proponency or the opponency on each topic. In this event, research and analytical skills are critical, as are extemporaneous and impromptu speaking skills. An added benefit is that students become familiar with current social and political problems and learn parliamentary procedure. Typically, students will compete in 3 or more "sessions" (rounds) per tournament, arguing different bills and resolutions each time. Speakers will be evaluated on their analysis of the arguments, use of evidence and delivery.

Congress is fast paced, and there's a lot going on in each house; it is recommended that speakers bring a pad of paper and make careful notes. This way you can keep track of what each "senator" says and refer to those points when you make your own speech and raise questions from the floor. You do not need to worry excessively about parliamentary procedure; each house will have a varsity-level student Presiding Officer (the "P.O.") to recognize speakers and motions, call for votes, etc. Houses are divided according to the students' experience: Novice, JV, and Varsity. Speakers usually stay in the same "house" for all 3 sessions (each session lasts 90 minutes, with short breaks in-between).

There will be between 15 - 20 students per house, and speakers are responsible to hand the judge a ballot before speaking. On this ballot the judge will make comments about the quality of the speech and delivery and rate each student on a numerical scale. After every 3-minute position speech, there is a one-minute cross examination period. The judge makes note of the students who ask cross-ex questions, and pays attention to the quality of those questions. At the end of the 90-minute session, the judge ranks the speakers in the house. The quality and quantity of the cross-ex questions, as well as the individual speeches and use of parliamentary procedure impact the rankings.

Finally, it's fun! Speakers use both prepared and impromptu speeches, and hopefully engage in spirited (but courteous) parliamentary debate! Speakers are allowed to use notes and prepared materials. The speeches should alternate between proponency and opponency. The bills and resolutions will usually be addressed in the order listed, and limited to two topics per session.

Judges are given the following criteria to assess the congress speakers:

- **Delivery**: Communicative and persuasive manner
- **Original Arguments**: Innovative views on the issue backed up by evidence
- **Clash**: Directly responds to the issues presented by previous speakers
- **Questioning**: Incisive, knowledge and direct questions and answers
- **Analysis**: Logical examination of the issues