

Harvard Model Congress Reflection

By Allison L. '20

When I first boarded the bus on Thursday at 7 am, I was nervous. I nervous because I had a lot of work due in the upcoming week, I still was not comfortable with public speaking about specific topics, and as a new leader of the club, I wanted to do well. I wanted to show that all my experience in model congress had made a difference and I deserved my leadership position. I didn't necessarily feel like I needed to win an award, but if I am sincere, leaving the Yale Model Congress conference earlier this year empty-handed increased my longing for some type of recognition.

The hours on the bus were uneventful. Most slept while some wrote notes on their committee's topics or the congressman or women they were representing. When we finally arrived at the hotel, we were split into rooms of two and had a couple of hours to eat dinner before going to the opening ceremony at 3, and later our committee rooms. As I put on my western business attire, I began to think of the weekend ahead of me. I will be frank and say that the conferences are a huge time commitment. The conference starts that Thursday night and ends at 3 pm on Sunday. During the weekend, committees meet from 9:30-12. We then have lunch for two hours, but go back to committee until 5:30. We once again have two hours to eat, but later, we go back to our committee rooms until we are dismissed at 11 pm.

This year, I represented Rick Allen, a Republican congressman from Georgia and I was in the House Education and the Workforce Committee. I had done a lot of research on my representative, and I felt comfortable with the topics our chair had chosen for us to discuss which included artificial intelligence, for-profit education, and Topic 1. Right away, we began to debate Topic 1. I knew that my congressman was for Title 1 reform, so I attempted to write a bill that would reform Title 1 by giving 35% of its funding to the states, while the federal government continued to control the remaining 65% of the funds. I worked on my bill for hours that night and felt confident when I presented it to my committee the next day. I had a lot of Republican support, but ultimately, my first bill had failed to pass. I was upset because this was not the way I wanted to start my weekend.

Nonetheless, I continued to make speeches when we began debate on the next topic, and once again wrote a bill. This time, I collaborated with a Democratic representative to ensure that my legislation was bipartisan. This bill passed unanimously! I was ecstatic. I had written other bills at previous model congress conferences, but this was the first bill in which I was the primary author, and this was my first conference in which my fellow representatives thought of me as "the girl who knew what she was doing." From then on, I gained confidence that I had not had with public speaking before. I began to write fewer notes before I spoke, I raised my placard to

talk more frequently, and my hands shook less while I spoke. I felt more at ease, and this boost in confidence assisted me in authoring another bill during the mock crisis and again later during our last topic debate. In full committee, which is a group of 3 house committees, I spoke for my first time as well as presented my bill which passed with a vote of 157 to 6 to 2!

That Saturday night, our delegation (everyone on the trip from CGPS), went to dinner together. It was a lot of fun to hear everyone speak so animatedly about the conference from times that they had spoken to funny things that had happened in their committee. It felt good to know that everyone was as excited about the experience as I was. Later, many of us returned to the prudential center, which was connected to our hotel, to get ice cream and continue discussing the conference as well as what we were excited for on the last day.

The next day, we had a full committee meeting in the morning. I was disappointed because I was supposed to present my bill to the Senate to see if it would pass there, and then eventually the Presidential Cabinet. Unfortunately, we did not have time to do so. Nonetheless, when closing ceremonies arrived, I felt satisfied with my experience at the conference. I had authored four successful bills, spoken more times than I could count, become friends with many of my committee members, and began to feel more comfortable with being uncomfortable.

During closing ceremonies, Anna K. '19 delivered a fantastic speech reflecting on her grandparents' experiences in the Soviet Union and how we are fortunate to have the rights we do. The Harvard students who were also the conference leaders then gave their speeches and reminded everyone that an award did not mean that your work was not valued, and for the first time, I believed them. Of course, I still wanted an award, but I was okay with not receiving one because I knew that I worked hard and now had the skills to do well at other conferences.

I didn't have any notable lows during the conference, but my high was winning an award. As I accepted my certificate and gavel from my chairs, one of them said to me that she is thrilled to know that there are young women like me who are taking an interest in politics. It was at this conference that I realized that I might want to begin a career in politics when I am older.

Model Congress has helped me tremendously with public speaking, writing speeches, and collaborative work. However, more importantly, it has provided me with the opportunity to meet many different people, and become knowledgeable about our government and current events. I hope that more teenagers develop an interest in politics and grow more aware as I feel model congress has helped me do. While it has its flaws, I am grateful for Harvard Model Congress, but would like to especially thank Mr. Buckley, Mr. Yashin, and the Columbia Grammar Model Congress Club for a great conference and a fantastic opportunity.