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OPENING CEREMONY REVIEW

Kim Neu, Missouri and Mallory McCampbell, New Mexico

Although the delegates arrived at Blue Ridge throughout the day Saturday, the Conference on National Affairs officially began 1:00 pm Sunday with the Opening Session. Two delegates from all represented states paraded into the Whittington Amphitheater carrying placards and flags as their fellow delegates cheered them on with pride and excitement. Further along in the program, the Presiding Officers demonstrated their articulatory prowess in reviewing essential aspects and values of the conference.

Presiding Officer Victoria Romano said that a retreat in Washington D.C. with the other PO's before the conference helped to facilitate the continuity of their personal speeches and demeanor, and the session as a whole.

"At the retreat we [PO's] bonded, got to know each other, trained, and reviewed parliamentary procedure," Romano said. When asked how she thought the Opening Session went, Romano said "I think it went great, but it was warm. The PO's were able to get through to the audience with grace and efficiency."

Presiding Officer Danielle Desaulniers said the preparation put into Opening Session started with a talk with PO advisors about what was important to tell the delegates.

"When we were up there we could see Bob sitting in the front row, tapping his watch," Romano said.

"A couple hours of hard work were put in, and it all turned out very well," Desaulniers said. She also commented on the personal introductions that the PO's wrote about each other. "We [PO's] made sure we included their name, college, where they are from, and fun facts," Desaulniers said. Also, Desaulniers said one of the PO's' major goals is to make sure the delegates feel comfortable enough to approach and talk to them.

"The Opening Session went really well; it didn't drag on at all. It got me super excited and pumped for all the possibilities this week is going to offer," Elizabeth Hallet, a second year delegate from Wisconsin, said. "It was really useful. It's kind of like a unifying ceremony where we get to know the PO's and hear about the experiences they had here."

Alaina Ryan, a first year delegate from New York, commented on the hot weather, but thought the Opening Session went very smoothly. "I liked hearing about the PO's, who they really are, where they are from," Ryan said.

Conference Director Bob McGaughey played a small but important role in the Opening Session. "My job was to just sit there and listen like everyone else," McGaughey said. But he did orchestrate the time schedule for each PO's portion of the presentation.

THE KINGS AND QUEENS OF CONA

Darryl Tibbs, D.C.

The Mixer is an event where delegates get time to rest and relax from the day's work. It is also a time for new delegates to mingle and get to know one another that start life-long friendships. Stephanie Pinkalla, of the Minnesota Delegation, said, "Meeting new people is cool," which is why she was looking forward to the event. Also, first time Delegate Greg Shepperd of the Kentucky Delegation, says "With the Mixer you get more personal with other people, when they are done being delegates for the day." He even expressed that his new experience with the event will help him achieve "The Blue Ridge Spirit." Meanwhile three time Delegate Marjan Charness, of the Arizona Delegation, had this to say, "The Mixer is a fun way to meet new people."

When you first walk into the Pavilion you see smiles, hear laughter, and feel the joy, but not just between delegates of the same group. (CONTINUED bottom of Page 2)



New friends were made by the card game Florida put on during the mixer.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR PRESIDING OFFICERS

INTRODUCING PRESIDING OFFICER LAURA BOLAN

Jessica Ayers, Florida

She may be a Presiding Officer, and gaining a degree in Public Affairs from Elmira College, but Laura Bolan cannot pass up an Oreos-Snickers Eureka Treat. This will be her fourth year eating them on the Mountain; the past three years as a delegate from New York, and this year holding one of the six coveted positions of Presiding Officer.

Bolan's interest in CONA, and Youth in Government in general started at the high school level. After unsuccessfully running for a PO position at her state conference, she served in the Governor's Cabinet for two years. "Being in a cabinet with 18 opinionated people really teaches you to work in a group," Bolan said when asked how her chapter and state level experience helped her as a presiding officer. The Blue Ridge Spirit first touched her during closing ceremonies of her first year at CONA, and has helped her strive to be a better servant leader everyday.

Of the three she brought to the Mountain, in her three years, her favorite proposal was mandating the availability of condoms in schools. This interest will follow her into the future.

After receiving a masters in Public Health, Bolan plans to become a lobbyist specializing in education, specifically sex education and HIV awareness. She believes that her CONA experience, both as a PO and a delegate, has helped her grow to the person who can achieve these goals.

"Our goals as a group of Presiding Officers are to be seen as respected officers who love the conference, help other delegates make experiences, and be more involved with the other delegates," Bolan said. Her advice for next year's POs, whomever they may be, is to remember, it is not about the glory, it's about servant leadership, hard work, and congeniality.

INTRODUCING PRESIDING OFFICER EMILY PRAMIK

Katie Alsup, Oklahoma

Emily Pramik, a Presiding Officer native to Pennsylvania, agreed to sit and chat for a few moments before running off to fetch herself a Eureka treat. During the conversation she revealed a few facts about her life. When asked about her personal interests and hobbies she spoke of her intriguing economic classes at the University of Chicago, as well as, an obsession with the news, film making, and her desire to travel. "You can't know where you come from until you go somewhere else," Emily states. She has thoroughly enjoyed all three years she has spent on the mountain and feels a deep connection to the people, as much as the place. Deciding to take a deeper look into the truly incredible Emily, a few more questions were asked that seemed to blow her mind. Emily finally came to the conclusion that as a flower she would have to be a day lily; they are bright and happy and yellow making them all the more exciting.

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THE KINGS AND QUEENS OF CONA (CONTINUED from Page 1)

When you see people with different colored shirts, representing different states, you realize that the Mixer is doing its job, mixing people together. As the night progressed, people were dancing more, laughing a lot, and having fun.

The Cha Cha slide could have been seen as symbol of unity, when it was played majority of the people knew the dance. Games were played to get everyone to introduce themselves to others. Beach balls were in the air and so was the excitement that lasted to the end. If people were shy before last night, then the Mixer mixed them with people to take the shyness away. Therefore the mission was a success as we all start off the week here at CONA.

Emily Pramik

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Emily prefers her toilet paper to come over the roll instead of under the roll, simply because it is a lot less messy. After debating with herself for a few seconds she concluded that the worst commercial she has ever seen happened upon her late one night, on the Spanish channel. "It was a car rental advertisement and they all just seemed so overly excited. It was the worst and best commercial all rolled into one," Pramik said. She is looking forward to a wonderful week and a continuance of memory making.



POs Emily Pramik (left) and Laura Bolan (right) speak during the Opening Session for CONA 2008

NEW VS OLD

Sarah McClure, Texas and Cyrus Goudarzi North Carolina

On the opening day of the YMCA Youth Conference of National Affairs, many first-year delegates shared in completely different and enjoyable experiences. Whether in the Robert E. Lee Hall or in the green rocking chairs around the facility, delegates showed their eagerness and excitement to meet their fellow delegates. For many first-years this atmosphere was overwhelmingly friendly. Many delegates, such as Austin for the Missouri delegation, stated that they found it interesting how people came on to their buses to introduce themselves. They also found it very welcoming when delegates even carried luggage to their room for them. Along with enjoying immediate immersion of social activity, delegates from differing climates reported that the view of Black Mountain initially caught their attention. Many first-year delegates reported that they enjoyed just rocking back and forth while staring into the sky and admiring the natural beauty of the mountain.

Bartering captivated new delegates. This concept of trading representations of different regions fascinated first-year delegates. Some delegates eagerly worked to obtain pins from all over the country. Sarah, a first-year delegate from Texas, stated that the "trading of the different items allowed [her] to overcome [her] shyness and reach out to [her] peers". The first day of CONA started a journey for many

first-time delegates that leave these delegates excited for what else is to come.

In contrast, returning delegates found they could turn their first year fears into anticipation after being away from the mountain for a year. With a year or two of experience under their belts, the returning delegates felt more prepared to present and debate their proposals. Some were even excited to take first year delegates under their wings to show them the CONA ways. Returning delegates felt that when they were first-years, they did not quite understand what to expect at the conference, but now, with their experience, they know more of the means and ways of CONA. Joe, a second-year delegate from Louisiana, stated he hoped that this year's conference could "live up to" last year's conference. On a different note, Lindsay, a second year from the Florida delegation, said that she did not wish to "compare the two years because [she] wants to live this experience for itself."

Although they all had amazing experiences, they are looking forward to gaining more memories at this year's conference.

Even though first-year delegates and returning delegates came to the conference with different expectations, in the end, they all come across the country to partake and enjoy the same festivities.

OFF OUR ROCKER

Jess Willis, Delaware

As most of you have probably heard, the media of CONA is expanding. In addition to web and printed editions of *The Blue Ridge Journal*, this year's news will also be featured in an online blog at conapress.blogspot.com. This blog, titled "Off the Rocker" is to include daily articles, complete with corresponding videos and pictures. As a blog, delegates or any blog readers, will be able to view the page and post comments (YMCA appropriate ones of course) about the content. Also, constructive criticism, comments, questions, or suggestions are more than welcome- they are encouraged. That said: read, enjoy, and come back often.



And it begins. *Delegates share proposals during 1st committee.*

THE TRIPS BEFORE THE TRIP UP THE MOUNTAIN

CONA, in itself, is a great experience with diversity of people, cultures, and traditions from all over the country. Although the conference is four plentiful days of work and play, some delegations made detours on their way to North Carolina. The Michigan delegation started their trip a week before the actual conference, by spending time in Washington, D.C. There they visited The National Mall, the Whitehouse, Chinatown, the Library of Congress, The Capital, the Supreme Court, and Grand Central Station. The day before arriving at CONA, they visited Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. "Riding the subway was my favorite part of the pre-trip. It made traveling easy and inexpensive, I loved it!" says Leah Ouellet, Michigan.

The delegations of Kentucky, Missouri, and Ohio met in downtown Louisville, KY and had dinner at Fort St. Live, met superstar Gavin DeGraw, visited the Muhammad Ali Center, and had a lock-in at the downtown YMCA. According to Ohio delegate Jermaine Richardson "the best part of our pre-trip was meeting some of the other delegations before we got to the actual conference, and visiting the

Sharde Fleming, Michigan
Muhammad Ali Center."

The California pre-trip was hosted by a very down to earth bus driver, Bobby Allen, who took them all over Atlanta, GA and Chattanooga, TN. They visited Rock City, the Jimmy Carter Museum, and the birth place of Martin Luther King Jr. The group's favorite visit by far was to the International towing and Recovery Hall of Fame & Museum, there Bobby joined in on a live Bluegrass band. Delegate Lindsay Dooner says that she "enjoyed dancing with Bobby and him teaching her to play the fiddle."

Although groups seem to have taken some nice pre-trips other delegations such as Minnesota plan on a post-trip to New York City. There they plan to tour NBC's Studio, visit China town, little Italy, Manhattan, and they plan seeing the Lion King.

Although CONA has many activities and exciting things for the delegates to partake in, many delegations still chose to take their separate trips. That just proves that CONA promotes excitement whether it is before or after the actual conference.

WELCOME HOME DELEGATES!

Welcome delegates to the 41st annual Conference on National Affairs at the Blue Ridge Assembly! For those of you returning to the Mountain, as Presiding Officer Laura Bolen put it, "Welcome Home." For those of you here for the first time, welcome to the Mountain. As the week progresses, proposals are heard, and debates are fought, lost and won, friendships will be forged that will last a lifetime. Those you meet here at CONA will impact your life, just as you impact theirs, in an unbelievable number of ways. With this in mind, step forward with your opinion, step forward in the debates, and remember to make the most of this brief but exhilarating experience. Best of luck to all delegates!