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# IOWA Youth Congress



## THE FUTURE LEADERS OF IOWA

Members of the Iowa Youth Congress have a unique opportunity to lead and make their voices heard. They discuss issues with state legislators, get a hands-on taste of how government really works, and form relationships with other high school students from across the state.

Iowa high schools with the highest minority populations are invited to participate in the Iowa Youth Congress. Members convene yearly in the Iowa House Chambers at the State Capitol in Des Moines. They hold elections and then propose, debate and pass three bills. A plan is then created to present the bills to state lawmakers in the following legislative session. Members have a real, distinctive opportunity to influence the policies in their state!

Thank you to all sponsors, community members, legislators, participating schools and chaperones for providing Iowa's future leaders with this impacting opportunity.

# ANNUAL SESSION HIGHLIGHTS



## *4th Annual Session, Iowa House Chamber*

The 2009-2010 Iowa Youth Congress (IYC), composed of 76 representatives and alternates from 29 high schools around the state, held its 4th Annual Session in the Iowa House Chamber on Friday, November 13, 2009.

After an inspiring welcome and opening remarks from Representatives Ako Abdul-Samad and Phyllis Thede, IYC members elected officers and then broke into the following committees: Community and Environment, Higher Education, and Education/Prevention. These committees debated and discussed potential bills, submitted by IYC members prior to the session. The IYC then reconvened and committee chairs presented the bills for debate.

The majority of the students asserted that the most empowering element of the event was sitting in the House Chambers and addressing the Congress, just like actual Iowa law-makers.



***“You are going to learn that you have different opinions. The key is to respect those opinions. And to enjoy it.”***

***- Rep. Ako Abdul-Samad,  
Opening Remarks***



## ***Approved Bills***

The Iowa Youth Congress members contributed a variety of perspectives, provoking lively and interesting debates on an array of issues. After much formal discussion, both in committees and as a large group, the Congress voted on three bills:

- Revision of the Eminent Domain Law in Iowa
- Sign Language (ASL) as a Foreign Language Option
- Resolution on Higher Education/Iowa Opportunities Workforce Act

Forms of the latter two bills were discussed in the Iowa General Assembly in 2010.



# ANNUAL SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

## *Election of Officers, Iowa House Chamber*



*IYC Cabinet Members (left to right): Arti Bhakta, Cameron Griffin Redmond, Christian Hurd, Vera Zhao*

The Iowa Youth Congress elected a President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary to oversee the annual session and other IYC activities throughout the year.

Nominations for IYC cabinet positions below are taken at Regional Meetings prior to the session. Candidates give a speech at the annual session and then the IYC votes for its Cabinet. The following students were elected:

### **President**

Cameron Griffin-Redmond  
West High School, Iowa City

### **Vice President**

Christian Hurd  
Ames High School

### **Treasurer**

Arti Bhakta  
Clinton High School

### **Secretary**

Vera Zhao  
Ames High School



*Iowa Youth Congress members in the Iowa House Chamber, November 13, 2009*

Dream Creator Sponsor

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# ANNUAL EVENT HIGHLIGHTS



## College/Career Fair Participants:

- AIB College
- Bankers Trust
- Briar Cliff University
- Buena Vista University
- Central College
- DMACC
- Drake University
- GO! e-magazine
- Graceland University
- Indian Hills Community College
- Iowa College Access Network (ICAN)
- Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- Iowa State University
- Mercy College of Health Sciences
- Simpson College
- University of Iowa
- University of Northern Iowa



## College/Career Fair, Embassy Suites Hotel



Following the Iowa House Chamber session, the Iowa Youth Congress members attended a College and Career Fair at the Embassy Suites Hotel in downtown Des Moines.



The IYC members collected information and spoke with representatives from 13 colleges and several other companies and agencies.

Students and participants stated that the small setting provided opportunities to have productive, interesting conversations about the future.

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*It's our name . . . and our promise.*



IOWA ASSOCIATION of COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRUSTEES



# ANNUAL EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

## *Dream Forward Dinner, Embassy Suites Hotel*

After the College/Career Fair, the Iowa Youth Congress hosted its 3rd Annual Dream Forward Dinner at the Embassy Suites Hotel. During the formal dinner, a recognition ceremony took place to honor sponsors and organizers of the program, as well as students.

Students also enjoyed an inspiring message from keynote speaker Ed Barnes, Executive Director of the Willkie House. Finally, the Des Moines Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Step Team performed. After the performance, the students danced the night away and celebrated a job well done.



**Ed Barnes,  
Dream Forward Dinner  
Keynote Speaker**

Ed Barnes is the Executive Director of the Willkie House, Inc., a youth development and child enrichment center. The Willkie House is the oldest African-American community-based organization in Iowa, having operated for more than 92 years. Ed is a licensed social worker, a Substance Abuse Assessment Counselor, and a certified HIV/AIDS educator. As an author and trainer of cultural diversity, Ed has lectured widely throughout the state and country, promoting health, wellness and spiritual well-being.



*Iowa Youth Congress members  
enjoying the Dream Forward  
Dinner and Dance*



*Delta Sigma Theta Sorority,  
Inc. Step Team Performance*



# OFFICER REFLECTIONS



***Cameron Griffin-Redmond, President  
West High School, Iowa City***

I got to meet a lot of new people and worked with people that I probably never would have worked with prior to my Youth Congress experience. Just the thrill of being able to come up with an issue and turn it into a bill and have it passed by the legislators - that's one of my dreams and ambitions.

***Christian Hurd, Vice-President  
Ames High School***

I feel it is an honor to be voted the IYC Vice-President. I am proud to feel that my fellow youth trust me in leading them to making our state better. This has been one of the best experiences I have had where I debated bills, presented problems to the House, and actually had a part in leading the discussion and vote of our bills. I was happy with the experience and the people I met. The Iowa Youth Congress gave me hands-on experience in discussing and voting on bills. The Iowa Youth Congress gave me a chance to try and change legislation to help out my community. The Iowa Youth Congress let me make bills and let the legislature know what problems they need to fix in the community.



***Arti Bhakta, Treasurer  
Clinton High School***

This year was my first time at the Iowa Youth Congress. I learned a lot about the process of passing a bill and made many new friends with similar interests. I felt inspired to know that I was taking part in changing Iowa laws for the better of the youth and others around us. I greatly appreciated my fellow IYC members voting for me as this year's Treasurer. I hope next year, more minorities join and express their opinion to Congress. IYC is a great program, allowing minorities such as myself to express their opinions and ideals.



***Vera Zhao, Secretary  
Ames High School***

The Iowa Youth Congress has been a great way to meet new people who share similar or opposing views on topics. This has been a great way for us, as teens, to make and vote on bills that will help to directly benefit or affect us. This was such an enjoyable experience, and I was so excited when my peers elected me as Secretary, because it was a great opportunity to take a more active role.





## CHAIR REFLECTIONS

***Chris Wells, Region D Chair  
West High School, Iowa City***

Being a part of the Iowa Youth Congress has given me new insight into the process of legislation at the state level and beyond. I will look forward to the new experiences and knowledge that I will gain by being a part of the Iowa Youth Congress.



***Kensie Channon, Region B Chair  
East High School, Des Moines***

Iowa Youth Congress is a very wonderful experience for me and gets better every year. For my first year, I had no clue what I should do so I tried to blend in with others. But awhile after the discussion about the bills that we wanted to propose to the legislature, I helped vote. When it was time to vote for people's responsibility, I decided I wanted to be the chairperson for my region. It's my second year as a chairperson so far. I was glad because I got to propose some deaf issues and one of them passed. I am looking forward to next year and will propose more deaf issues. Also, I might think of becoming vice-president or something like that. Iowa Youth Congress is very helpful for leadership skills. Future youth should join the Iowa Youth Congress.



***Anab Abdi, Region C Chair  
Washington High School, Cedar Rapids***

My 3 years with the Iowa Youth Congress have been extremely memorable; they are times I won't ever forget. I had loads of fun while dealing with important issues, and I'm glad I got to be a part of it. As for being one of the chairs for my region, that was an honor also. I'm glad my fellow members elected me to send their ideas onto the bigger group. All together, Iowa Youth Congress was such an amazing experience, and if I was able to do it once again, I would do it in a heartbeat!.

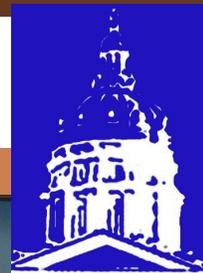


***Alexis Andrews, Region E Chair  
Hoover High School, Des Moines***

This was my first year in Iowa Youth Congress. It has been one of the most gratifying experiences of my life. I was elected chair of Region E, which gave me leadership skills that I can apply to the rest of my life. The session in which we actually discussed and debated the bills was a true learning opportunity that gave great insight into how laws are processed and passed. It also made me appreciate the work that Iowa's lawmakers do. I met people from all over the state with whom I shared interests and made lots of friends. It was an overall wonderful experience.



# PLANNING SESSION & REGIONAL MEETINGS



## *Planning Session, Mercy College of Health Sciences*



On November 14, 2009, the Iowa Youth Congress held its planning session at Mercy College of Health Sciences in Des Moines. There the students reviewed the bills that were passed in the Iowa House Chambers the day before and began to draft the requirements needed for each bill. Members raised potential questions and created a list of pros and cons for each bill.

Then guest speaker John Fritch, Director of Communication Studies at the University of Northern Iowa, presented two helpful communications workshops. The first, "The Use of Cross-Examination," focused on how to formulate questions and use them to attain necessary information. In the second, "Policy Analysis From A Systems Perspective," Dr. Fritch discussed different ways to analyze the merits of a policy proposal based on different arguments.

## ***Regional Meetings***

Regional meetings were held in October to draft and debate legislation ideas and take nominations for officer positions.

The Eastern regional meeting was held at Kirkwood Community College in Cedar Rapids. The issues discussed included ESL opportunities, the Iowa Eminent Domain Law, and texting while driving.

The Central regional meeting—encompassing students from Des Moines, its suburbs and schools closer to central Iowa—was held at DMACC Urban Campus in Des Moines. Students discussed and debated issues such as school uniforms, sign language as a foreign language option, teen pregnancy, and drop-out rates.

Finally the Western regional meeting was held at Iowa Western Tech Community College in Denison. The students focused on regulating agricultural waste, cell phone use while driving, and higher education.

*From October 2009: Regional Meetings  
Kirkwood Community College (right)  
and DMACC Urban Campus (below)*





## Get Involved!

For information about participating in the program, nominating a student, volunteering, or sponsoring the Iowa Youth Congress, contact:

**Division of Latino Affairs**  
Iowa Department of Human Rights  
515-281-4080  
[www.latinoaffairs.iowa.gov](http://www.latinoaffairs.iowa.gov)  
<http://iyc.latinoaffairs.iowa.gov>

The Iowa Youth Congress is managed by the Division of Latino Affairs, along with other divisions of the Iowa Department of Human Rights, including: The Commission on the Status of Iowans of Asian and Pacific Heritage, The Iowa Division of Deaf Services, and Iowa Status of African-Americans.

## Thank You Created by IYC Member Cameron Montgomery



Some people sit and preach about whether leaders are made or born. I think that a true leader ignores such arguments and instead concentrates on how to become better at leading people... The Iowa Youth Congress was really a wonderful experience not only for me, but for my peers as well. This experience not only helped me develop more leadership traits, it also taught me...! "BIRDS FLY"....."AND EAGLES SOAR"!!!!!! I want to thank Byron Phillips for giving me the chance to witness such an extraordinary experience! + The project manager Melissa Esquivel, and the rest of the I.Y.C. staff!!

Thank you so much!  
Best Wishes,  
Cameron Montgomery



# SPECIAL THANKS

## 2009 Sponsors

Thank you again to the sponsors for making this program possible and investing in Iowa's future:

