

PROFESSIONALISM IN STUDENT CONGRESS

by

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"The Student Congress serves as an excellent demonstration of Democracy at work," states the 2000 NFL Student Congress Manual. Unfortunately, in our experience, a seemingly benign practice is obstructing the achievement of this noble aim. A growing number of students, by making foolish motions desecrate the honor of Student Congress and disrupt students who want to participate in serious debate. We believe that Student Congress, because it is meant to be similar to the real United States Congress, should also mimic the United States Congress's code of conduct and atmosphere of formality and decorum.

Students at various congresses that we have attended changed the names of their fellow representatives to ridiculous titles. For example, "Representative Gerber" would have been changed to "Funkmasta Gerber," or "Comrade Gerber," while "Presiding Officer Keele" would have been changed to "Supreme Funkadelik Keele." Certainly, these titles would not be fitting for an elected representative of the people.

Similarly, students make motions to alter the names of the chamber in which they are competing to equally absurd appellations. There have been motions to change the "House of Representatives" to "House of Pain, and the name of the Senate to "Duma." Such legislation only serves to waste time and spawn debate on mindless topics.

Finally, representatives also attempt to introduce legislation regarding topics that, while humorous, are trivial and unworthy of serious debate. For example, at one tournament the only piece of legislation that we passed was to ban miniature toilets from all male restrooms and replace them with trough-like urinals. Our house actually spent time considering the worthiness of the need to avoid urine stains on one's pants. It is laughable to think that the United States Senate or any other legislature, which we are supposed to be emulating, would argue

over the quality of the men's facilities.

One may certainly argue: "Oh, these students are merely trying to have fun. They have become tired of the proceedings and just want to make it more creative and interesting. They are not really hurting anything."

Au contraire! These unprofessional practices do grave damage to the purposes of this activity. Combined, we have competed in over twenty Student Congresses, including Nationals in Portland. We have concluded that competitiveness is at least two-thirds mindset. This is not only the confidence that one can do well, but also the sense that one is participating in something significant. That is why participants dress in formal attire. Congress normally has an aura, if you will, of respectability.

The practices described above serve only to disperse that air of honor. It is difficult for anyone to take a competition renamed "The Flying Circus" very seriously. It misrepresents what we are trying to accomplish in our political simulation. We are trying to increase our understanding of critical policy issues, not further British comedy.

The introduction of legislation intended only to provoke thoughtless debate also defeats the goals of Student Congress. A finite quantity of time is allowed for speeches. Ridiculous bills and resolutions squander that time and rob others of the change to distinguish themselves in intelligent debate. Furthermore, these bills are usually proposed at the spur of the moment; no one has had a chance to do the proper research for a speech. (However, we grant that occasional debate of this nature can be enjoyable and does relieve stress. We suggest that legislation of the comedic variety be reserved for debate during the period of time when results are being tabulated. The speeches would not be scored, but it would keep people occupied while the results are being calculated.)

This atmosphere of seriousness should be maintained while scored competition is in

progress because students will tend to be stronger competitors. When students take something seriously, they will probably try harder and perform better. Conversely, if their mindset is that something is not important, they will probably not put much effort into the proceedings. The overall quality of the Congress will suffer.

To solve the aforementioned problems, we suggest various adaptations to the NFL Congress rules. First of all, prohibit any and all name variations from the standard titles of "Representative" and "Senator." In addition, forbid any variations from the basic names of the chamber in which one competes, i.e. "House of Representatives" and "Senate." Secondly, we believe that legislation drafted and introduced the day of competition should only be ruled in order if all other legislation has been exhausted. Of all of the legislation introduced at the end of the day, that which is of a serious nature should be given precedence over non-serious legislation. Finally, a section should be added emphasizing the desirability of professional conduct and behavior in Student Congress.

In conclusion, the lack of professionalism in Student Congress is becoming disheartening. Several students are attempting to undermine the virtues and values taught by democracy in exchange for immature silliness. We believe that the best way to counteract such problems is a change in the rules of the NFL Student Congress Manual itself. We want Student Congress to be an "excellent demonstration of Democracy at work."

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