



## YMCA of Metropolitan Washington DC Youth & Government

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www.dcyag.org

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May, 2009

Dear Educator,

Teenagers often question authority and test their boundaries. **The YMCA DC Youth & Government program, a vetted partner for DCPS and a number of charter schools, channels these natural tendencies in a positive direction by encouraging teenagers to become authority figures and set new boundaries.** YMCA DC Youth & Government is a civics education and mock government program that challenges teens to **address problems, create solutions and become leaders.**

Throughout the year, Youth & Government students participate in this valuable experimental learning program that combines civics education, leadership opportunities, and community service. The program's classroom experience and school year events culminate with the Youth Legislative Weekend, which gives students a chance to develop bills and debate issues that are important to them. Students act as DC City Council members, and every year, they elect a Youth Mayor to represent them in the City.

We are currently recruiting new delegations for the 2009-2010 school year. Through intensive exercises, participants improve their analytical and writing skills—skills that are vital to academic and career success. Our program staff will provide training in August for interested teachers, one to two college volunteers to assist in the classroom, and a thorough curriculum to implement the program. Additionally, students receive community service hours for participating in Youth & Government. Thanks to the assistance of community organizations and our generous donors, **the program is provided at no cost to your school!**

DCPS and many charter schools throughout the City have implemented the program in a variety of ways: incorporating the program into their DC history, government, general Social Studies or English curriculum, creating an after school club, placing their Student Council members in the program, or utilizing their existing Mock Trial or Debate programs. Please consider getting your school involved in this powerful and empowering program. **To form a delegation, your school needs one faculty adviser.** To get started today, please return the enclosed interest form or call our program team at (202) 369-9975.

If you would like to learn more about YMCA DC Youth & Government, we will be happy to send you additional information, or you can visit our website at [dcyag.org](http://dcyag.org). We are excited to work with you as we expand this effective program and provide more teenagers with the opportunity to become ethical leaders and responsible citizens.

Sincerely,

Jason L. Reimer, Esquire  
Chairman and Founder  
YMCA DC Youth & Government

Enclosures: Program Overview, Washington Post Articles, Interest Form

★ Empowering youth to become ethical leaders and responsible citizens ★

# YMCA DC Youth & Government 2008-2009 in Review



## Students Focus on Change, Hope at This Year's Legislative Weekend

Following the tone of the recent election season, YMCA DC Youth & Government students focused on creating change and hope at this year's Legislative Weekend. In his opening address, Youth Mayor Damien White issued a call for students to stand up and make change. White both emphasized the need for students to work together as a community and encouraged participants to recognize that creating change is a lifelong process. In one of the speech's most powerful moments, White stated "My influence is limitless. I create my own borders. I am change."

Advocating for change also

formed the powerful core of the message delivered by the opening ceremony's keynote speaker Councilmember Harry Thomas Jr. Inspiring students to create change in their communities, Thomas emphasized the importance of public service and drew on examples from the civil rights movement. Thomas charged students to "Take what you learn and become the candle, the light in your community...It starts with one and multiples from there." Students were inspired by this call to leadership. Following the message, one student explained, "He motivated us to be activists and public intellectuals in a community that needs young voices to define the conditions of the future.

In the environment created by these messages, students moved forward into the week inspired to become the responsible citizens and ethical leaders the program seeks to create. Youth moved between the chambers throughout the weekend, engaging in heated debates on bills, reporting on events in "The Youth News" newsletter, hearing speeches from candidates for positions at next year's Legislative Weekend, and voting on a wide range of legislation.

## Students Learn Skills for Engagement at November Youth Summit

The 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Youth Summit took place on Friday, November 14, 2008 at the University of the District of Columbia. Dr. Sarah Stiles, the Program Director for DC Youth & Government, commenced the event and the beginning of the new school year. Dr. Stiles welcomed new and old students with a very entertaining and captivating slideshow that displayed the enthusiasm and excitement experienced from student participants throughout

the years. Dr. Stiles welcomed the Youth Mayor Damien White to introduce himself and provide words of encouragement to his fellow delegates. Guest speaker Tyrell Holcomb, a previous DC Youth & Government participant, motivated the students with an excellent speech about real change witnessed in the world of politics.

The students were broke up into groups, met with group leaders, and discussed the issues they faced at school and in their community. The Youth Summit

opened the students up to ideas on how to debate and how to form a bill regarding these issues. The summit prepared the students for the upcoming year and Legislative Weekend.

**"I am powerful. My influence is limitless. I create my own borders. I am change." - 2009 Youth Mayor Damien White**

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Students Deliver A Vision For D.C. Program Simulates City Government

By Carrie Donovan Washington Post Staff Writer Thursday, March 16, 2006; Page DZ03

If students ran the D.C. government, the city's tax on cigarettes would jump to \$2.50 a pack.

That was one of the bills passed at this year's YMCA D.C. Youth and Government legislative session, held last weekend at American University. More than 100 high school students from D.C. public and charter schools gathered to debate 57 bills of their own creation and to elect a youth mayor for the next year.

Although the bills that pass through this legislative body are not entered into the D.C. Code, some may make their way into real law in the future. D.C. Council member Kwame R. Brown (D-At Large) offered to review the bills and possibly draft some for legislative action by the D.C. Council when he spoke at the group's youth summit last fall. YMCA spokespeople said they will send the bills not only to Brown but to the entire council, Mayor Anthony A. Williams (D) and the mayoral candidates.

Multiple bills called for improvements in Anacostia River cleanliness, school lunch



Italo Cruz, left, Eric Vance and Marsha Collins of Cesar Chavez Public Charter High School for Public Policy are sworn in as delegates. (Photos By Marvin Joseph -- The Washington Post)

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quality, gang prevention programs and availability of sex education programs in schools. One measure called for banning all tobacco sales in the city.

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Some of the more radical bills called for the use of chemical castration for sex offenders and capital punishment. They were not approved.

The D.C. Youth and Government program, now in its fourth year, is one of 44 established across the country by the YMCA to emulate state -- or, in the case of the District, city -- governments. City officials were absent from the conference last Friday but only because organizers had to turn down three council members who wanted to speak, according to founder and advisory board chairman Jason Reimer.

"We wanted to make sure the students made *their* voices heard," he said.

D.C. Youth Mayor Janeese Lewis, speaking like a seasoned politician at the podium, implored her fellow delegates to continue to be active in their community by pressing elected officials to listen and to work on issues that matter to youth.

"When you see city council members, don't let them just shake your hand. Ask them what they will do if you or your parents vote for them. Ask your parents who they are going to vote for or if they are even going to vote," she said.

Lewis, a 17-year-old senior at School Without Walls, feels particularly strongly about public housing, gentrification and school funding. It bothers her that long-term residents may not be able to afford rising property taxes and rents. She wonders whether she'll be able to afford to live here when she graduates from college.

During her opening remarks, Lewis railed against the city's commitment to baseball, at the expense, she said, of residents. "They are fixing up the area around the stadium and kicking out the people who live there," she said. "We want our grandparents to be able to live in the city they built."

Not surprisingly, the D.C. Gentrification Grandfather Clause was the bill Lewis supported with the most vigor. The measure would offer fixed property tax rates to D.C. citizens who have owned their homes for 10 years. The bill was one of six that passed.

The others were:

- **Broadening the Horizons Act:** Each school would have four career fairs each school year for students in grades 9 through 12.
  - **No "Draftation" without Representation Act:** D.C. residents would be exempt from any military draft until they have a vote in Congress.
  - **Internship Opportunity Act:** Three high school students would intern in a D.C. Council member's office each spring semester.
  - **Price of Pain Act:** The tax on cigarettes would increase from \$1 to \$2.50 a pack.
  - **Special Request for Special Ed:** At least five certified special education teachers would be employed at each school to teach academic subjects to students with special needs.
- Rochelle Mincey-Thompson of Cardozo Senior High School was elected youth mayor for the coming school year.

# D.C. Youths Worried About Neighborhoods

By DEBBI WILGOREN  
Washington Post Staff Writer

Chuck Lowe, 19, has stared in disbelief at the luxury condominiums under construction along Rhode Island Avenue near North Capitol Street, where prostitutes still walk the streets in search of business.

Eugene Roach, 19, has seen notices from real estate agents left at his family's rowhouse and others like it in the Trinidad neighborhood, offering to purchase properties that can be renovated and resold.

As home prices have risen in the Northwest Washington neighborhood of Brightwood, Kasmin Holt, 17, has watched the Latino migration to the historically African American neighborhood area slow—replaced by an influx of upper-income singles and couples, many of them white.

Such was the portrait of gentrification painted yesterday by participants in the first Youth Summit organized by the YMCA of Metropolitan Washington.

Many of the more than 100 young people who attended said they felt personally affected by the real estate boom that has swept the District and some of its suburbs. Several said they fear being displaced or, if they stay, seeing their neighborhoods transformed.

"It just seems like there's more and more Caucasians moving in," said Holt, a senior at Cesar Chavez Public Charter High School for Public Policy who lives near 14th and Ingraham streets NW. She said city officials and developers are "trying to satisfy young people who want to come to D.C. because it's becoming like a hot spot."

The youths attending the summit—most from the District but a few from the suburbs—heard from city officials about zoning and financing programs designed to protect affordable housing and create new low-priced homes in rapidly changing areas.

The teenagers knew little, if anything, about the ways such programs are being implemented in their neighborhoods. When they broke into small groups to debate responses to gentrification, they fo-

cused on issues involving education: the need for more good teachers and better facilities in public schools, better after-school and job training programs, new ways to make sure that existing programs were made available to more students throughout the city.

"I had four good teachers in three years at Dunbar," said Lowe, a 2002 graduate of Dunbar High School now enrolled in the cadet program of the D.C. Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department. "A lot of teachers in the school system—seems like they don't want to be there."

Organizers of the summit said it was the first major event of the YMCA's new Youth & Government project, which is modeled after similar programs in 43 states. In addition to gentrification, participants discussed censorship in the student and professional media.

Participants in the program will research public policy issues and discuss solutions throughout the winter, ending with a mock legislative session in the spring.

The program is coordinated by Jason Reimer, who participated in Youth & Government sessions in his native New Jersey as a teenager and, after attending American University, decided to bring the idea to the District.

John DeGout, executive director of the National Capital YMCA, said the initiative fits in well with other youth programs in the building at 17th Street and Rhode Island Avenue NW—programs that are less well-known than the YMCA's pool, gym, weight room and other fitness-related amenities.

"It's a misnomer that we're just swim and gym," DeGout said. "That's just not true."

Hundreds of children and teenagers attend summer camps and after-school programs at the YMCA, and there are leadership groups, philanthropic programs and empowerment sessions for girls. DeGout said the YMCA focuses on teenagers because other community organizations tend not to.

"There are lots of things for little kids to do. There are lots of things for adults to do," he said. "Teens just get lost."



Chuck Lowe, center, a fire department cadet, participates in the summit, where youths discussed urban renewal and education. Some said they feared being displaced from their homes or felt their neighborhoods were changing.

The Washington Post  
Saturday, November 15, 2003



## YMCA DC Youth & Government Program Interest Form

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Delegation Name \_\_\_\_\_

Faculty Advisor \_\_\_\_\_

School Address \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Estimated number of delegates \_\_\_\_\_

### **For Office Use Only**

Date Received in Office By \_\_\_\_\_

Delegation Coordinators Assigned: \_\_\_\_\_

Delegation Student Leader/AB: \_\_\_\_\_

Summit Registration \_\_\_\_\_ Actual Attendance \_\_\_\_\_

Credentials Received \_\_\_\_\_ With Release Forms \_\_\_\_\_

Hotel/Meals \_\_\_\_\_

Leg Weekend Actual Attendance \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_