

POLITICAL WHIPPERSNAPPERS PROVE STEREOTYPES WRONG

MICHELLE CHUNG, MA ★ STAFF WRITER

One phrase most young adults hear from their elders is: "You're too young to understand." For too long, the younger generation has been undermined and criticized for their age rather than their maturity, intelligence or drive. Even so, a few have successfully skipped some serious stepping stones in their lives to become influential politicians, proving to the world that really, age is just a number.

1. Aundre Bumgardner. Bumgardner was a volunteer, intern and political aide for various politicians before he found himself being elected as the youngest Connecticut state representative in history at age 20. Coming from a family of immigrants (as his grandmother came from Panama and his mother came from Puerto Rico), he hopes to give a voice to the overlooked and guide the state to prosperity.

2. Jeramey Anderson. On the day of his 22nd birthday, Anderson was sworn in as a Mississippi state representative and became known as the youngest African American lawmaker in the state and nation's history. He managed to take 60 percent of the vote despite being a Democrat in a mostly Republican state. He is fighting to better the education system while a student at Tulane University.

3. Saira Blair. At just 17 years old, Blair was a senior in high school when she launched the campaign that allowed her to win a seat in the West Virginia House of Delegates a year later, defeating



SUCCESS ★ WEST VIRGINIA HOUSE OF DELEGATES MEMBER AND YOUTH AND GOVERNMENT ALUM SAIRA BLAIR SERVES AS THE YOUNGEST LEGISLATOR IN THE NATION.

PHOTO FROM 'ELECT SAIRA BLAIR TO HOUSE' FACEBOOK

her 44-year old opponent in a vote of 63 percent to 30 percent. As a current economics major at West Virginia University, the Republican is popular for being the youngest elected lawmaker in the United States. But the greatest part? She attributes her time in Youth and Government as to why she was inspired to run in the first place.

Dozens of young adults have made their way into the political system, and these three are only a few who have shown that age does not define one's ability to become a proponent of change. Any individual with the knowledge, dedication and passion can better our nation. The only question to ask now is: Who will we see taking the country by storm next? ★

Do you know of others who have entered politics at a young age and are making a positive difference in our world? Share your examples with us through any of our social media!



LIVING OUT SERVICE AND INFORMED PARTICIPATION ★ THE PRESIDING OFFICERS OF 2016 FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: GABRIELLE DONOHOE, MA; RUSSELL LUKE DAVIS, OK; KATE HANNICK, MO; HARRISON SATCHER, FL; ANKITA SATPATHY, MUN; DANIEL HAYWORTH, TX

PHOTO FROM THE CONFERENCE OFFICE ARCHIVES

BLAST TO THE PAST: CONA FORTY-NINE YEARS IN THE MAKING

JACK DENSMORE, TX ★ STAFF WRITER

In 1968, 62 delegates came together in Stone Mountain, Ga., to celebrate the first YMCA Youth Conference on National Affairs (CONA). They traveled from eight different states. In 2016, 637 delegates from 39 states, the District of Columbia and the Model United Nations have come together in Black Mountain, N.C., to celebrate 49 years of intense debate, long-lasting friendships and a feverish desire to better our country and our world.

Since CONA's founding, there has been an effort to involve all 50 states, an aspiration being emphasized as the 50th anniversary approaches. Progress continues as Nebraska joins the conference for the first time, and North Dakota returns for the first time since 1981. Even states without Youth and Government (or Youth in Government) programs can participate. Those states - Alaska, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Rhode Island and Utah - are known as the Ambassador delegation.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

BEAUTY OF CONA HISTORY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

Since CONA moved to the Blue Ridge Assembly in 1972, delegates look forward to certain traditions every year. You already experienced the “meet and greet,” where strangers become acquainted, old friends reunite and everyone is encouraged to trade state pins and shirts. Each morning delegates wake up to the sound of “Carolina in the Morning.” As the sun rises over the Blue Ridge Mountains, take in the magnificent view from the green rocking chairs on the Eureka Hall porch. Catch the Blue Ridge Spirit.

Whatever state or delegation you represent, make your own mark and make your own traditions. Today’s the day you become a part of CONA history.



BLUE RIDGE SPIRIT ★ NO WHERE WILL YOU FEEL MORE PATRIOTIC THAN WITH THE DELEGATES AT CONA.

PHOTO FROM THE BLUE RIDGE JOURNAL ARCHIVES

CARPE DIEM WITH FEARLESSNESS, CONFIDENCE, AUTHENTICITY

AMY CARSON DENNIS ★ MEDIA DIRECTOR

I don’t like to express myself in clichés, but some thoughts are too important not to be stated.

This moment, this day, this time in your life can never be duplicated.

Your time on the mountain, these six days are not to be wasted. I’m sure people have given you advice about what you must do while at CONA. This advice was all probably valid, but I can simplify it for you:

Do what you can with this opportunity you have been given.

A mistake you don’t want to make is thinking that you will get another week on the mountain. From year to year, your circumstances could change drastically. You cannot glide through this week. It is not a trial run. Make the most of it and allow yourself to be inspired and motivated by the people around you.

It is important to acknowledge the great honor it is to be here. Some were chosen because you stood out among hundreds of other delegates at your state program. Others had to go through a rigorous application process, not to mention those who have

been raising money all year to pay for the plane ticket to get here. No matter the obstacles, you have been given an opportunity to speak for what you believe in a place where people will show you support, despite their own beliefs (spirit fingers to that).

I could tell you what Blue Ridge means to me, but it will mean something completely different to you. The secret to making the most out of this is to be your authentic self. You are among hundreds who understand we all need to improve ourselves and our country. You are likeminded people with individual ideas to change the collective nation. This is a place where you are encouraged to be utterly yourself, because otherwise everyone would be debating the same topics, and there would be no solutions.

So be yourself and speak up when you feel inclined. Take in your surroundings and get to know the people behind the politics. Mark your CONA experience with fearlessness, confidence, authenticity and a carpe diem mentality that will make this week one you will never forget. ★

Amy Dennis is a junior at the University of Montevallo in Alabama. The conference alum returns to the mountain this week to serve the members of the CONA media.



UTILIZE TECHNOLOGY

★ STAY PREPARED AND INFORMED WITH THE YAPP

MOBILIZING CONA WITH THE YAPP APP

JAMES FARNSWORTH, MN ★ STAFF WRITER

New since 2015, YAPP is the official mobile application for the YMCA Conference on National Affairs. The app includes information such as the conference schedule, news feed/announcements from the Conference Office, committee names, conference map, committee assignments (as they’re made), finalized GA and plenary calendars, videos and more! Many delegates find that using the app contributes to their positive conference experience, as it provides them with easily accessible information in a clear and simple delivery platform. ★

You can download the app at: <http://my.yapp.us/YMCACONA>

Some information also will be posted at ymcacona.org/info

★ MEDIA CORPS 2016 ★

NNEMKA AGBAFE ★ NORTH CAROLINA
ANNIE BOOZ ★ NORTH CAROLINA
MOLLY BRENNAN ★ WISONSIN
BLAKE BRILES ★ NORTH CAROLINA
PETER BROTHERS ★ KENTUCKY
MICHELLE CHUNG ★ MASSACHUSETTS

COLBIE COOK ★ INDIANA
JACK DENSMORE ★ TEXAS
JAMES FARNSWORTH ★ MINNESOTA
JP FLEMING ★ NEW JERSEY
SASKIA GOSH ★ OKLAHOMA

MEAGAN HOLLOWAY-RAGLAND ★ ALABAMA
AIJAN ISAACS ★ INDIANA
JILLIAN MICHAEL ★ OKLAHOMA
LEAH O’NEILL ★ DELAWARE
DONTAY SMITHWICK ★ DELAWARE
GREGG WHITFORD ★ NEW MEXICO

MEDIA DIRECTOR ★ AMY CARSON DENNIS, AL