

What to Expect Competing in Congressional Debate

Congressional Debate is a simulation of the U.S. legislative process. In this event, students generate a series of bills and resolutions for debate and alternate delivering speeches for and against the topic in a group setting. Students are assessed on their research, argumentation, and delivery skills, as well as their knowledge and use of parliamentary procedure. **Maguire Radosevic** takes us through what it means to do Congressional Debate.

Why did you choose your event?

Before I even came to high school and joined debate, I had a keen interest in politics and economics. I am well-versed in current events and public policy, I watch C-SPAN like my friends watch ESPN, and I want to go into law and politics after college. When my debate coach gave our class a list of events in which we could participate, I knew immediately that Congressional Debate would be a perfect event for me. Debating about real issues in a setting analogous to that of the United States Congress would be the perfect way to express my passion, so I joined the event. That was one of the best decisions I've made since I entered high school.

What skills are important in Congress?

Persuasiveness, extemporaneous ability, strong research skills, and networking skills are the most important for success in congressional debate. Like a real congressperson, a student representative must be persuasive to convey their own ideas on a piece of legislation to their peers effectively. A successful representative must be able to think on their feet and speak extemporaneously because a Congress speech will be given differently during different rounds. A speaker must be able to adapt their speech to the arguments given in previously on both sides of the bill. One must also have strong research and analytical skills to make their arguments credible and their knowledge strong on the issues at hand. Congress encourages coalition-building and friendship. In order to make a session of Congress run smoothly, its participants must work together to ensure that the best and most controversial bills are debated.

What kind of challenges did you face in round?

One of the most substantial challenges that I have faced in Congress is mastering the art of cross-examination. Questioners are allowed to ask only one question at a time to the speaker. Cross-examination is supposed to be a time to attack an opposing speech, but it can be especially difficult to do this with only one question. However, if questioners work together as a team, they can combat the inherent ineffectiveness of the one-question rule.

What does a typical tournament look like for someone in Congress?

Each session operates by the rules of parliamentary procedure, which guarantees equal opportunity to speak on the floor to each member of the body. We start each session by electing a presiding officer, a student participant who enforces parliamentary procedure. After this, we decide as a body which bills we will debate, in order, for the session. Then, the debate begins. We begin with the first bill upon which we decided earlier, and the presiding officer recognizes a speaker to sponsor, or give an affirmative speech on the bill. This is followed by a cross-examination period. Then, the process is applied again for a speech against, or in negation of, the bill at hand. Members continue giving speeches on both sides of the bill until arguments are exhausted, in which case the representatives come to a consensus that we should move on. We then vote to decide whether the bill will be passed or rejected and move on to the next bill.



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— Maguire Radosevic, student,
Rockhurst HS, MO