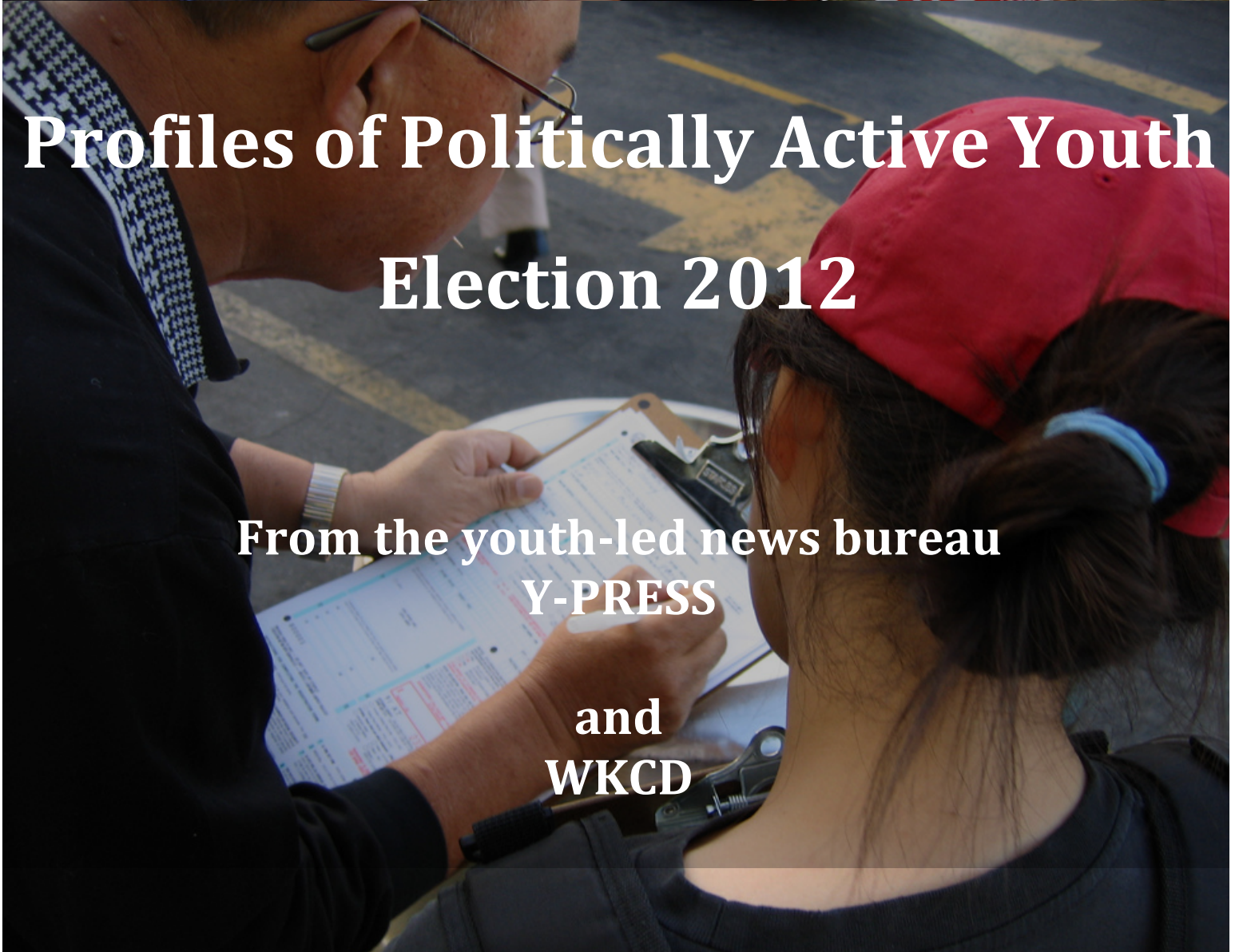




Profiles of Politically Active Youth Election 2012

From the youth-led news bureau
Y-PRESS

and
WKCD



Youth on the Trail: Election 2012

FOUR YEARS AGO, predictions of an unprecedented youth vote grabbed headlines—and, indeed, turnout in the 2008 election was the second largest in American history.

Today's headlines sound a different beat. “Kingmakers No More: Is Gen Y Too Jaded To Vote?” a recent article in Forbes Magazine begins. ABC News asks: “The Young and the Restless: Can Obama Recharge the Youth Vote?”

High youth unemployment, skyrocketing college debt, the anguish of undocumented immigrant youth, a crumbling public education system, the toll of ongoing wars, the excesses of the “one percent”. . . . How can today's 18 to 29-year-olds *not* feel disillusioned?

What *does* the political landscape look like to America's youngest voters in 2012? Which issues grab them most? What shapes their thinking?

To answer these questions, WKCD invited young journalists at Indianapolis' youth-led news bureau, Y-Press, to scour the country for politically active youth. For five months, Y-Press journalists located and interviewed an incredibly diverse set of politically active youth, twenty in all.

Young Democrats and Republicans. Occupy protesters and Tea Party ralliers. Youth delegates to both National Conventions. Youth running for local office. Youth creating their own political clubs and organizations. Youth who insist on “No Labels.”

The young activists profiled here defy stereotypes. And they offer a rejoinder to the headlines that call Gen Y politically jaded. Whatever your political beliefs, these youth will turn your head.

With strong hopes for our democracy,

Barbara Cervone, President
What Kids Can Do

Lynn Sygiel, Executive Director
Y-Press

October 22, 2012



Young delegates to the National Conventions

EVAN DRAIM, 17, ALEXANDRIA, VA

by Greta Herbertz, 14, Y-Press

In middle school, Evan Draim attended a Republican state convention in Virginia. It sparked his interest in politics and in 2010 he founded the Coalition for a Conservative Future. This year he was a delegate to the Republican National Convention in Tampa in August.

For the Coalition, Evan's responsibilities include speaking out on such issues as government spending and illegal immigration. He also endorses candidates who are most in line with conservative principles, including Mitt Romney, whom he feels will best preserve American values and the U.S. economy.

Right now his organization is focused on opening up new chapters to serve youth with conservative values, helping to staff volunteer centers for conservative candidates, and helping register youth to vote.

According to researchers, young voter turnout increased from 2004 to 2008, but fewer youth are expected to turn out for the 2012 election. Do you have any ideas why this might be?

I think it's kind of ironic because I think that the issues of 2012 actually are more important for youth than they were in 2008, purely because the federal debt has increased so much. But I think the reason that young people are hesitant is that in 2008, young voters pretty overwhelmingly backed President Obama, and the results have not been what they expected. And so voters who first voted in 2008 and who felt really optimistic about casting their ballot and changing the future of the country, now feel kind of apathetic.

How would you describe your organization?

The Coalition for a Conservative Future is kind of a nationwide group of high school conservatives who have banded together to kind of show their peers how the conservative

ideology is working for the benefit of younger Americans. And one way that we do that is by communicating about the issues in a way that young people can understand.

We're an entirely student-run organization, and the way that we talk about issues on our website, and the way that we communicate issues to our peers, is we first talk about how an issue affects young people before we talk about the solution. Because often we feel that a lot of people in their teenage years and college years don't necessarily realize yet how much the politics of today are going to impact their future.

So up to now, what do you consider your biggest success?

Well I consider my biggest success really to be motivating other young people to realize that they can change the course of a political party, and really to extend that to the nation.

I ran for delegate in the 8th District against a lot of people who were much more established. And my candidacy and my eventual win, I think, showed young people who were at that convention and other young people who have heard about it since that they can run for these positions, that they can get elected and that they can help change the face of Republican politics and American politics if they have the right vision, and if they have a new kind of perspective to bring to the table, regardless of their age.

EVAN KENNEY, 18, WAKEFIELD, MA

by Hrishikesh Deshpande, 17, Y-Press

Evan Kenney has been engaging in political debates with his teachers since age 12. Earlier this year, despite having no previous political experience, he campaigned to be a member of the Massachusetts delegation to the Republican National Convention, running as a Ron Paul supporter. Much to his surprise, he was elected, beating out such established politicians as former Massachusetts gubernatorial candidate Charlie Baker.

However, the delegate allocation committee stripped Kenney and 16 other Ron Paul supporters of their elected positions, although they signed affidavits pledging their support to the presumptive nominee, Mitt Romney. The allocation committee argued that the Romney campaign ordered the change, while the Romney camp pointed the finger at the allocation committee.

After testifying before the RNC credentials committee in Tampa, Kenney was awarded his delegate seat five days before the convention. Four other former Paul supporters were reinstated as delegates or alternate delegates.

What issue do you think is the most pressing for our country today and why?

I have two. I want to see an audit of the Federal Reserve because there is no transparency right now in our monetary policy. Our debt is just like over \$15 trillion? It's unsustainable. An equally important issue is bringing the troops home.

I'm a common-sense Republican. I just want to see my troops home, defending our country, not defending Pakistan's borders or Iraq's borders. I don't even know what they're doing

over there, but it's not defending our freedom right now. According to researchers, the youth voter turnout increased in 2004 and 2008. However, a lot of polls predict that fewer youth are expected to turn out for this year's election.

Why do you think that is?

Well there are no candidates that really excite the youth right now. I mean, Ron Paul was the candidate that excited the youth this cycle, and Barack Obama, you know, last cycle was the one who did excite the youth. It was really cool to see this young, charismatic guy, who was talking about change from the Bush era, which is fine, I want change from the Bush era. But we've seen four years of Barack Obama and we know that he's not doing anything different than George Bush did, except it's more extreme.

What do you plan to do as we get closer to the November election?

I am totally open to the idea of voting for Mitt Romney. I just need to see him embrace the right things. I need to see him embrace grassroots activism. their 12 points to make Congress work, and it's basically what it says: If Congress does not pass a budget, then there's no pay, then the Congressmen don't get paid. Do you know we have not passed a successfully balanced budget in 40 years? It's all because the conservatives won't like compromise on defense spending and the liberals won't compromise on Social Security.

KRISTIN MIDDLETON, 21, TEMPE, AZ

by Hrishika Deshpande, 17, Y-Press

Kristin Middleton says she's always been more interested in politics "than the average kid." However, her activism really took off two years ago when she interned with Sen. John McCain's Senate re-election campaign. The following year, she joined Arizona State University's College Republicans chapter, becoming its president in April.

She says that her experience working with a political campaign really spurred her interest in politics as she developed contacts and became more active in the Republican Party.

Her activism has definitely paid off. She attended the 2012 Republican National Convention as the youngest member of the Arizona delegation.

So once you decided you wanted to be a delegate, how did you go about being selected?

So when I decided I wanted to be a delegate, I started talking to people and getting my name out there and letting people know who I was. And the way the delegate process works is that there's a state convention in every state, and at the state convention, the people there elect who they're going to send to the national convention.

A little bit before the state convention, I contacted the Romney campaign in Arizona and told them who I was and told them how great it would look if a young person was able to

go, and they agreed with me, so they put me on their platform ... and then at the state convention, I was elected to go.

If you could bring any piece of legislation to the floor of Congress, what would it be?

I would definitely, for sure, bring legislation to protect the borders and for a stronger border 'cause I'm from Arizona, so I definitely see the consequences of allowing illegal aliens to just come into the country.

What advice would you give to other young people who want to become politically involved?

Don't be afraid to try. In my first internship two years ago with Senator McCain's Senate campaign, I remember feeling really timid and that this was just a completely different world than I had ever been in. Just try and get your name out there and don't be afraid to send your resume into places 'cause you never know what opportunities will happen for you.

JASON RAE, 25, MILWAUKEE, WI

by Carmela Verderame, 12, Y-Press

Jason Rae became interested in politics early, and at age 17 became the youngest delegate to go to the 2004 Democratic National Convention. He was also the youngest super delegate in 2008, which means he was elected based on his involvement in the Democratic National Convention. He is also the youngest person to be elected to the Democratic National Committee in 2012.

His role this year, as chair of the DNC's Youth Council, is to get young people involved in political activities. This council, which he helped to found, was started seven years ago to get young people—defined as those under age 36—to assume leadership roles in the DNC. This year, there are 644 youth delegates to the DNC.

What issues do you think is most pressing for our nation?

I think there are a lot of pressing issues, but first and foremost is ensuring that the American economy continues to grow and that everyone pays their fair share. We see too many Americans like Mitt Romney getting by without their fair share while middle-class people struggle.

What do you plan to do after the convention is over?

I'll still be chairing the DNC Youth Council and working to continue finding ways to involve more young people in the party.

So what do you feel is your biggest accomplishment career?

One of the things I'm most proud of at least is working through the DNC Youth Council and helping work with the national convention to plan the youth activities related to the

convention. In particular, (I'm proud of) working with young people and training them on the delegate selection process so that they can get themselves elected as delegates or alternates for the convention. Because of that, we saw a record number of young delegates elected this past year, and that's one that really makes me proud.

What kind of advice would you give to youth who feel that politics doesn't affect them?

Everything that's a side of politics has an effect on their daily lives. While they might not realize it, the federal budget will have an effect on them. But really, the candidates we are electing are going to decide whether or not they are going to have equal rights or whether or not they are going to have health insurance or things like that.



Young Democrats

FRANCIS CHOE, 23, HONOLULU, HA

By Izabella Robinson, 14 Y-Pres

Francis Choe has been interested in politics and the workings of government since elementary school. In high school, he participated in youth legislature programs and joined his first campaign, for a candidate seeking state office. That only whetted Choe's appetite.

Also in high school, he joined the Young Democrats of Hawaii, of which he became president at age 20. "I believe I was the youngest state president of a Young Democrats organization in Hawaii and as well as across the nation," he said.

Choe continues his activism on behalf of Democratic candidates. He is the youngest member of the party's state central committee as well as the youngest vice-chair of the Oahu County Democrats, an island-wide organization.

What has been the best response to your political work?

Well, I think the most inspiring response is, “We need more people like you” — that’s been a comment by older members of the Democratic Party who have a strong desire to start the process of transitioning out of being “very active” members of the party. There’s going to be a time when you and I are going to have to step up and take on these leadership roles.

What advice would you give to other youth who want to get involved?

My advice is go out there and do it. If there is a will, there is definitely a way. I had no personal connections to the political world at all. My family has no political connections. I didn’t know where to begin, but I just went on the Internet and did my research and started to build my network from there.

I got involved in the 2006 campaign with the statehouse race, and subsequently I got involved with the youth legislature program, and then the next year, the executive director from the youth legislature program remembered me and reached out to me to join U.S. Rep. Mazie Hirono’s campaign in 2008. It’s just a snowballing effect.

If you could pass any piece of legislation, what would it be?

At this point it would definitely have to be the DREAM Act. You know, Hawaii is known as a melting pot. Most of the people here are immigrants. There’s first, second, third, fourth, fifth generations that are here now. It just doesn’t seem right for us to know that there are millions of undocumented immigrants here in the country, and we need to find and identify a process in which we can fully integrate them into our society.

HUEY REY FISCHER, 20 ROCKPORT, TX

by Greta Herbertz, 14, Y-Press

Huey Fischer hadn’t been involved in politics until he joined University Democrats at the University of Texas at Austin. He has not missed a meeting since, even being promoted to president. “I’ve gotten a lot of opportunities through my activism in the club, and it’s always been beneficial to students,” he said.

Besides his role with University Democrats, Huey has become involved in other political endeavors, including serving on Texas’s State Democratic Executive Committee as a representative from the Hispanic Caucus. The SDEC regulates the Democratic Party’s activities in Texas.

As for the national election, Huey believes that Obama will win. “I think we’re starting to see a lot of the baggage that Mitt Romney has, and that’s definitely coming out and playing a part in this election. I don’t think youth are going to get that enthused about Romney’s agenda.”

What issue do you think is most pressing for our country right now and why?

I mean right now the economy is more pressing for everybody in general. We really need to be on the road to recovery, and I think we are on the road to recovery with President Obama. That's honestly the most pressing issue to students as a whole because right now the job market's tough for after we graduate. And unemployment numbers are the highest for under 30 year olds. So I definitely think we need to see more progress along that front.

What would you say to young people who don't think politics affect them?

I would ask them to look at their electric bill, you know, their utility bill. I would ask them to look at their financial aid. I mean, it affects so many different parts of our life that people just need to ask the question, "Well, why is this the way it is and why is that the way it is?" And usually, usually the answers lead to some politician and some vote.

Were you involved with the 2008 campaigns? And if you were, what has changed between these elections?

I wasn't too involved. I was living in D.C. the fall of 2008. I was a page for Senator [Kay Bailey] Hutchison and we couldn't really get involved in campaigns at that point. I do remember watching it and I do remember definitely supporting President Obama and the entire Democratic ticket.

I believe what's changed is that the stakes are not as high. We've made progress under the new president. We've passed so many reforms, so many new pieces of legislation over the past four years, and if we end up losing this election, we'll start seeing the repeals of Obamacare, cutbacks on things like the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act and things of that sort. I definitely don't want to see the pendulum swing just yet. That's definitely in the back of my mind.

SAMINA HYDERY, 18, ALBANY, NY

by Hannah Zimet, 17, Y-Press

Samina Hyderi has been a political enthusiast from a young age. In July 2011, she was elected National Chair of the High School Caucus, Young Democrats of America, which has 150,000 members from California to Puerto Rico. Her responsibilities include recruiting and finding political opportunities for the membership.

"You don't really see young people going after politics as their main extracurricular activity, but we're trying to change that," she said.

She will attend the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania in the fall for a dual-degree in economics and political science.

What do you consider your biggest success?

I think our annual high school leadership program in July is one of our biggest accomplishments because it brings together about 40 exceptional, politically active high

school students from across the country. So high school students are trained to be better political activists, not to mention that it is lots of fun.

This year the program is more hands-on and students take away a wealth of knowledge that has to do with how to campaign. Also in the past we've had house briefings as part of the program. We've had roundtables between young Americans (our academy students) and young Lebanese visitors. And we've even heard from minority leader Nancy Pelosi, so that's probably the coolest thing.

Would you describe the issue that you think is most pressing for our country?

One thing is that we need to make sure that college is affordable so we need things like breaks on interest, loan forgiveness and loan refinancing opportunities. And I think that once young people are out of college, we're always having trouble finding employment, so the second thing is increases in employment. And so this could be done by just making pledges to hire young people and making programs to help find employment.

Which presidential candidate would you most like to talk to and what would you want to discuss?

It's a little hard because I am working for President Obama. However, I think it'd definitely be really interesting to talk to Mitt Romney and see where he stands on some issues because from his campaign, it seems he's really not for young Americans. I think it'd be interesting to question his stances right now into that. Maybe he would even get the a-ha moment.

IAN KEA, 17 INDIANAPOLIS, IN

by Max Gabovitch, 19 Y-Press

Ian Kea says he has always been involved in politics. After joining his high school's Young Democrats club as a freshman, he set his sights on the Indiana High School Democrats as a junior. This year, he is vice president of the organization.

Ian says that when he joined, Indiana High School Democrats was almost dead, but he worked hard with other members of the executive committee to revive the organization, which now has 23 participating chapters. Their hard work paid off in another way: The Indiana chapter won the High School Democrats of America's "most developed chapter" award.

How would you describe Indiana High School Democrats?

Indiana High School Democrats does a lot of things. The big thing is expansion right now. We encourage all high schools in Indiana to have a Young Democrats club. Also, our big thing is endorsing candidates in the primaries.

Recently, we endorsed Shelli Yoder in the 9th congressional district, and she won her primary and now she is the candidate for the 9th district. Our other big thing is organizing

rallies and events. We helped with some LGBT events and we also helped with some political events as well.

Why a Democrat?

The morals and values of the Democratic Party inspire me to help with the organization and to help spread it. The Democratic Party serves the middle class, they help the majority of the population. The party itself supports working families and supports equal rights and supports health care. I feel very strongly about those rights, and that's why I continue to push on with this organization.

Do you plan to change your activities as the election gets closer?

Our big thing is working with Obama for America to register voters. Statistics have shown recently that there are a lot of Democrats out there, but a lot of them don't sign up to vote. So, what we're trying to do is get our members and our executive committee to get out there and just go door-to-door and get people registered. We're just really trying to go grassroots here and go to the people, not just put stuff out on Facebook and Twitter.

How frustrating is it for you to see people who are eligible to vote not exercise that right?

Unfortunately, it's very frustrating. I hope people realize that people in other countries fight for the right to vote and die for the right to vote. In the American Revolution and the War of 1812, people died for the right to vote. Some people just don't understand the power of voting. They say that one vote won't matter, but if you have one voter come and then another voter come and another voter come, that's three votes, you know. It adds up.

BETSY QUALLS, 19, PEACHTREE CITY, GA

by Ali Tahir, 17, Y-Press

Early on, Betsy Qualls felt a little lonely as president of her high school's Young Democrats club. "It was kind of hard at first because we live in a very heavily populated Republican area, so it was hard to find students who were willing to join the club," she said.

Still, she managed to get a group of students together, and every Wednesday morning they would gather to talk about current events and national issues, sometimes debating students from the Young Republicans club.

Qualls took these meetings seriously—creating PowerPoint productions and dressing in formal clothes. Generally, response to her efforts was positive, though not always. "People used to come up to me and call me Sarah Palin—that's definitely not something you want to be called as a Democrat," she said. "I would correct people, but they didn't really get it."

For Qualls, the club was not only a chance to share her passion for politics, but also to show students "how important it is to be involved and learn what's going on in our government and current news." Now at Berry College in Georgia, she continues to stress that message and urge her fellow students to vote.

What inspired you to get involved with the Young Democrats?

I always thought I was headed toward a political future, meaning I followed the 2008 election very closely. I was very interested in watching Obama and McCain go at it. And although I couldn't vote yet, it was just something that interested me, so I thought that if I was going to head toward a political future, I needed to learn more and delve into it more. So I thought, "Hey, why not join the Young Democrats Club?" and I did.

To be honest, things have changed for me now. I'm not headed towards that direction as much, but I'm still very passionate about keeping up with what the Democrats are doing and what's going on in the government.

What is the issue that you think is most pressing for our country?

Well, being an environmental scientist now—I'm majoring in that in college—I've grown more passionate about environmental issues in our country, including the big things like global warming and clean energy. And from studies, I've become more aware of the importance of making new habits and changing regulations in the United States because obviously what's happening right now isn't setting us up for a good future.

I think America should step up and be a world leader in becoming greener and taking responsibility for the harm that we've done to the environment. And some people say, "Well it's too late," but you know, better late than never. I'd like to see some strong candidates or leaders come into the government and try to work on that more because I think that's going to be important.

What advice would you give to other kids who want to get politically involved?

My first piece of advice would be to inform yourself thoroughly. Read up on important issues. Learn about the views of our current government officials and know who is running our country. In order to form an opinion, you have to first gather the information to back it up.

And then, always keep a strong but open mind. You have to be able to listen to others. If you find yourself in a political debate with someone, listen to what they have to say first. Be the nicer one in the argument, but really you don't have to agree with them. There's nothing wrong with a healthy debate because it keeps you on your toes.

DAQAVISE WINSTON, 18, MUNCIE, IN

by Isaiah Treadwell, 17, Y-Press

Daqavise Winston has always had a love for politics and for his community. "I enjoy working with the policy and electoral process," he explained.

In high school, he joined the presidential campaign of U.S. Sen. Hillary Clinton and was asked to lead the Indiana High School Democrats, which represents High School Democrats chapters across the state. He also became co-communications director of the High School Democrats of America.

Currently a freshman at Ball State University, he intends to major in social studies education. Still, he's campaigning for Democrats Joe Donnelly for U.S. Senate and John Gregg for governor and serving as chairman of the platform committee of Indiana Young Democrats. "It is my duty to help write a platform that we hope our state party will adopt in 2014," he explained. "This platform will more in tune to what Democrats stand for across the spectrum."

Describe the issue you think is most pressing for our country. Why?

The economy, hands down. Our fiscal crisis is the most pressing issue we have faced in awhile. It is very saddening when we see our elected officials put their elections before the people they were elected to serve. I will take a lot of heat for this next statement (but) Democrats have to realize that we must have balanced budgets that cut spending and reform entitlement programs.

I commend Representative Paul Ryan for his courage to take on the task of cutting waste and reforming entitlement programs. According to researchers, youth voter turnout increased from 2004 to 2008; however, fewer youth are expected to turn out for this year's election.

Why do you think that is?

For one, youth are not taken as serious as they should be. In 2008, because of the nature of the campaigns, youth had many reasons to be excited and involved as they were given more options of getting involved besides the usual phone bank and canvass jobs. This year, the main issues are not ones that excite youth or really pertain to them.

Do you see yourself as politically involved in the future?

I hope to one day be a candidate myself. In the meantime, I will continue to be involved in the elections here in Indiana and encourage others to get involved in shaping the direction and policy of the future.



Young Conservatives

EVAN KENNEY, 18, WAKEFIELD, MA

by Hrish Deshpande, 17, Y-Press

Evan Kenney has been engaging in political debates with his teachers since age 12. Earlier this year, despite having no previous political experience, he campaigned to be a member of the Massachusetts delegation to the Republican National Convention, running as a Ron Paul supporter. Much to his surprise, he was elected, beating out such established politicians as former Massachusetts gubernatorial candidate Charlie Baker.

However, the delegate allocation committee stripped Kenney and 16 other Ron Paul supporters of their elected positions, although they signed affidavits pledging their support to the presumptive nominee, Mitt Romney. The allocation committee argued that the Romney campaign ordered the change, while the Romney camp pointed the finger at the allocation committee.

After testifying before the RNC credentials committee in Tampa, Kenney was awarded his delegate seat five days before the convention. Four other former Paul supporters were reinstated as delegates or alternate delegates.

What issue do you think is the most pressing for our country today and why?

I have two. I want to see an audit of the Federal Reserve because there is no transparency right now in our monetary policy. Our debt is just like over \$15 trillion? It's unsustainable.

An equally important issue is bringing the troops home. I'm a common-sense Republican. I just want to see my troops home, defending our country, not defending Pakistan's borders or Iraq's borders. I don't even know what they're doing over there, but it's not defending our freedom right now. According to researchers, the youth voter turnout increased in 2004 and 2008. However, a lot of polls predict that fewer youth are expected to turn out for this year's election.

Why do you think that is?

Well there are no candidates that really excite the youth right now. I mean, Ron Paul was the candidate that excited the youth this cycle, and Barack Obama, you know, last cycle was the one who did excite the youth. It was really cool to see this young, charismatic guy, who was talking about change from the Bush era, which is fine,

I want change from the Bush era. But we've seen four years of Barack Obama and we know that he's not doing anything different than George Bush did, except it's more extreme.

What do you plan to do as we get closer to the November election?

I am totally open to the idea of voting for Mitt Romney. I just need to see him embrace the right things. I need to see him embrace grassroots activism. their 12 points to make Congress work, and it's basically what it says: If Congress does not pass a budget, then there's no pay, then the Congressmen don't get paid. Do you know we have not passed a successfully balanced budget in 40 years? It's all because the conservatives won't like compromise on defense spending and the liberals won't compromise on Social Security.

SEAN HARRINGTON, 19, ARLINGTON, MA

by Max Gabovich, 19, Y-Press

Sean Harrington has an impressive political resume, having served in the Young Republicans and Teenage Republicans, and in multiple local, state, and national campaigns and organizations. Most recently, he was elected chairman of the Arlington Republican Town Committee, making him the youngest committee chair in the state of Massachusetts.

Sean says that he was inspired to get politically involved after reading a biography of Calvin Coolidge, the former president and Massachusetts governor, who became involved in politics because he felt it was his civic duty. "He basically was a man you wouldn't expect to be in politics. He was very quiet, very to himself," he said.

What do the Teenage Republicans do?

Teenage Republicans, in my opinion, help connect young conservatives with each other. They give them good tools to campaign, to organize, to know what it's like to be in campaigns and to be members of Republican county committees or city committees and town committees, depending on where you are and the systems that you have in your state. They get you in contact with your state parties, which is really helpful.

You get to meet a lot of interesting people. A lot of really amazing congressmen, senators, governors and political activists have been Teenage Republicans before and that's where they got their start. So it's a great opportunity for any conservative-minded teen, or Republican teen, to become active.

What do you consider your biggest success as a Republican?

My biggest personal success was getting the Pledge of Allegiance in every classroom in Arlington High School. It was a really amazing accomplishment because for over 30 years we didn't have the Pledge of Allegiance at my high school, and there are students at elementary schools who didn't even know the words to the Pledge of Allegiance, which was really troubling to me. I thought that was terrible.

What advice would you give to other kids who want to get involved in politics?

I think the most important thing is, just be informed. Don't take everything I say for granted. Don't take what Obama says for granted. Don't take what Romney says for granted. Don't allow yourselves to do that. Look into what they're saying. Research the topics that they're talking about. Research the budgets. The best way to be an activist is to be informed.

JUDAH LOHRMAN, 16, BRAZIL, IN

by Alaina Bradds, 17, Y-Press

Judah Lohrman first began to take an interest in politics four years ago after the presidential election of 2008. She became a member of Generation Joshua, an organization devoted to teaching youth about the political process and encouraging them to become leaders, and is now vice president of her local club.

Generation Joshua sponsors Benjamin Rush scholarships to encourage members to get involved in politics and their local communities. To fulfill some of the service requirements, Judah opened up her home for meet-and-greets with area candidates. Four years later, she still hosts candidates in her home regularly.

Judah plans to stay politically active and would like to be a legislative assistant.

What is an issue that you think is most pressing for our country right now and why?

I think mostly it's the oppression of Christians who are involved or who just want to go to church, and schools teaching evolution. I've been most supportive of one of the new laws that says that schools can choose their own curriculum, like whether they want to choose to teach evolution or Christian Science.

What would you say to someone who doesn't think that politics is important?

Politics does affect your life, whether it's in the grocery store, the food you eat, or in your schools. Government has a hand in almost everything. Whenever you get up, your time is controlled by the government 'cause of daylight savings or things like that. The government has a hand in what kind of food you can buy from the store, in sales tax, what kind of clothes you wear, what you're taught in schools. So it is pretty important and you need to get yourself out there and know what the government is doing.

What advice would you give to other kids, who want to get politically involved?

The best way to get involved is just to put yourself out there and make yourself known to be someone who would really help even if they're out of their comfort zone 'cause that really encourages people.



No Labels

MARCUS DEMERY, 20, INDIANAPOLIS, IN

by Carmela Verderame, 12, Y-Press

Marcus Demery is a freelance photographer who just returned from spending seven months with Occupy Chicago. Not only did he share the same passion for change with the crew there, he also got a chance to perfect his craft. Like other Occupiers, Demery believes change needs to come from the grassroots, not from either political party.

“I am neither Democratic or Republican. I believe that everyone deserves equal rights as citizens living in this free nation. What Occupy has done is empower people and give them back the necessary skills and the necessary qualities that they need in order to work with each other and to create change globally.”

What was your primary responsibility with Occupy Chicago?

Honestly, it was just to take photos. I was working with the Occupy Chicago press committee, the social media committee. I was running the Twitter feed. I was running the Facebook page. As a photographer, it was my duty to go out to every protest, every business station, every community event, so that way we could document everything that was happening that was a part of Occupy Chicago.

Could you name an event involving Occupy that you felt was especially successful?

Yes, it was the Chicago NATO and G8 summit protest, a grueling, 17-hour, on-the-ground event from the beginning, 7 a.m. to probably maybe 12:00 a.m. the next day. My involvement was simply to be a photographer, to document everything that was happening, to make sure that my partners were safe, to make sure that I could document as much as I could any unethical or illegal things that were happening as far as what the police officers were doing to nonviolent protesters and so forth.

The things that I saw that the Chicago police officers committed were unnecessary, unethical and probably illegal. However, it was quite successful because of the community groups, the different groups that were a part of the whole demonstration side of the protest. Everybody worked together and communicated way before [the summit].

If you could pass any piece of legislation, what would it be about?

My first legislation would be about the quality of our education. We have a broken system, and I feel like it is necessary for everybody to have a quality, decent lifestyle if they are to have an equal opportunity to have an affordable education.

MASON GARARD, 16 INDIANAPOLIS, IN

by Sigal Tavel, 16, Y-Press

Apart from his silent support of Barack Obama in 2008, Mason Garard was not involved in politics until two years ago, when his father introduced him to the group **No Labels**, a bipartisan organization that distributes money and votes to get more moderate candidates elected and to “break the gridlock in Washington and actually get stuff done,” he said.

After two years of doing research and organizing events, Mason is now the Indiana youth coordinator for No Labels as well as the founder of the No Labels club at North Central High School in Indianapolis. He also helped in the effort to re-elect U.S. Sen. Richard Lugar, at first deciding just to “drop in” to the office and eventually getting absorbed in campaign, which was unsuccessful.

In the years ahead, Mason hopes to help expand the No Labels movement, raise more money and support for the organization, and keep his grades up. He would eventually like to run for political office.

Describe the issue that you think is most pressing for our country and why.

Hyper-partisanship, I believe. I think it incorporates some of the key issues that I think are dividing the country right now, specifically gridlock and money in politics. And of course that’s not exactly helped by the fact that now we have these super-PACs that just donate unlimited amounts of money to a campaign cause and make these situations just worse because nobody has the power to oppose them now.

If you could pass any piece of legislation, what issue would it be about and what would you be trying to change?

If I had to pass any piece of legislation, it would be the current bill that's in the House right now, the "No budget, no pay" bill. That's actually a bill that No Labels supported and came up with as part of their 12 points to make Congress work, and it's basically what it says: If Congress does not pass a budget, then there's no pay, then the Congressmen don't get paid.

Do you know we have not passed a successfully balanced budget in 40 years? It's all because the conservatives won't like compromise on defense spending and the liberals won't compromise on Social Security.

According to researchers, youth voter turnout increased from 2004 to 2008; however, fewer youth are expected to turn out for this year's election. Why do you think that is?

I think that from what I've seen at North Central [High School], people have become more disillusioned with the government. I think that it all leads back to the conflict in Washington. Lack of compromise leads to lack of anything getting done. Lack of anything getting done leads to a negative view of politicians. And a negative view of the politicians by the youth leads to lack of voter turnout. I think it's as simple as that.



On the campaign trail

SALAINA CATALANO, 20, ROCHESTER HILLS, MI

by Priya Mirmira, 15, Y-Press

Salaina Catalano is a strong supporter of political activism among youth. During 2008, Salaina started out small by volunteering for the Obama campaign and making calls on his behalf. However, after she enrolled in Albion College, she increased her political activity.

Now a junior, she is president of the Albion College Democrats, where she is in charge of planning events and recruiting members. She also started Students Organized for Political Awareness, a club that encourages political discussions minus the personal attacks.

Salaina eventually wants to go into politics, though she's met with little enthusiasm from her extended family. "I want to go into it to prove them wrong," she says, "I want to disprove that stereotype, I guess. There's a lot of cynicism about politics."

What inspired you to get involved in politics?

I've always been interested in politics. Like one of my earliest memories was going to a Bill Clinton rally in '96. I grew up in a pretty politically active family—they taught me to be a Democrat. I may be the president of College Democrats, but I am a big believer in voting for a person, not the party. Like the first time I voted was in 2010, and I voted for a Republican for governor just because I thought he'd do a better job.

What issue do you think is most pressing for our country and why?

Education because without basic education for everyone—no, not just basic, a good education, a great education for everyone—people aren't educated enough to talk about any other issue. We need to strive for a high level because that's the starting point for every other discussion we have.

Which presidential candidate would you most want to talk to and what would you discuss?

I'd want to talk to Mitt Romney. I want to ask him about that article he wrote, it was titled "Let Detroit Go Bankrupt." That just really makes me mad. He obviously has a reason for saying that, and I understand that, but I want to know more. Why he would kind of argue against the auto company bailout that President Obama passed that worked? I just want to hear his thoughts on that.

To me he seems like a moderate, and I want to find out if he really is because then I would consider voting for him, to be honest.

ZOE DOBKIN, 17 POTOMAC, MD

by Leeann Sausser, 18, Y-Press

Zoe Dobkin knows that government has a large impact on youth and has stepped up to make sure her voice is heard. For the 2008 presidential election, she and her aunt went canvassing in a lower middle-class neighborhood in Pennsylvania and enjoyed discussing the issues with people face-to-face. Because Pennsylvania was considered a swing state for the candidates, Zoe felt she "was really making a difference."

Last summer, she interned with the Washington, D.C., affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union, which inspired her to start an ACLU chapter at her high school and fight a measure to set a curfew in her county. The chapter is going strong and while the measure was tabled, Zoe is confident that it will not be brought up again.

This fall, Zoe will not only be attending Georgetown University but also serve as the chair of the ACLU's Future Leaders Council, where she will be in charge of political events aimed at youth. A supporter of the Democratic Party, she also hopes to be involved with the election by phone banking and through opportunities at her college.

How would you describe ACLU?

The American Civil Liberties Union is such a great organization. It's nonpartisan and it doesn't receive any government funding, and I actually believe it helps defend freedom and uphold the ideals, not only of our Constitution, but also ideals geared towards helping our society become more tolerant of one another.

What do you consider your biggest success as part of the organization?

I would say being more enlightened about the civil rights and civil liberties issues in our local area and also around the country, and bringing in others so that they become more educated about the issues. I really didn't know that much about D.C. statehood. I didn't know that much about the problem, and I didn't know that much about ways to find a solution. And then also, like when we were combating the curfew, I learned so much about my local government and ways to get more involved and to learn about issues that I care about that are happening right in my neighborhood, which I thought was really important.

What do you think about the changes in youth involvement in the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections?

Our rhetoric and momentum have kind of slowed down, which makes sense. After four years of a president, of course he's going to make some mistakes and everybody won't be as gung-ho as they were before. And, you know, I really don't see a lot of those YouTube videos coming out. There was a really powerful one from Will I Am, the "Yes We Can," the Barack Obama song, and I know like almost all my friends saw that. So I don't really see a lot of YouTube campaigns aimed at getting youth involved.

And I think youth are maybe a little more pessimistic, but I mean I still see my friends doing phone banking and stuff, so I'm not too worried. But I do hope that the youth vote comes out in as big or bigger numbers as the 2008 election because we really could determine it for sure.

JOHN KENNEDY, 20, INDIANAPOLIS, IN

by Naomi Farahan, 15, Y-Press

John Kennedy has always been interested in politics. Having grown up in a family of lawyers, government policy has always been a part of dinnertime conversation. In 2008, Kennedy turned talk into action. He became involved with the Obama for America campaign.

Looking back, he said helping Obama sway Indiana voters was one of his biggest political successes. But his efforts didn't stop there. He began working on other campaigns, and in

2011 was an intern for Melina Kennedy, a Democrat who ran unsuccessfully for mayor of Indianapolis (no relation). While Kennedy says he will always be interested in politics, he's laying low right now as he enters his junior year at Hamilton College in Clinton, N.Y.

What was your primary responsibility with the Melina Kennedy campaign?

I was a field team intern, which involves a lot of being on the ground, going and actually contacting voters. But then also it involved organizing events and getting volunteers from all the major campaigns within the Democratic Party. It was challenging to unite all the campaigns but it was really cool when individuals from each group came out to support other campaigns.

What would you say to someone who thought he/she wasn't affected by politics?

It's so much money that you don't take home in your paycheck. It's whether either you or someone you know can have the ability to marry a loved one of the same sex. I mean, even if you don't think it affects you right now, I guarantee you there will be multiple points in your life when you will have to decide which side you're on.

What advice would you give to other kids who are trying to get politically involved?

It's so easy to get involved. They need you and you should do it. You should at least see if that's what you're interested in. We need young people involved because right now young people are bearing the brunt of paying for the cost of everything. We bear the brunt of paying for the cost of Social Security reform, health-care reform. So, since it's going to affect everyone when you grow up, you might as well get involved.

RATNAJYOTHI PATEL, 16 RICHMOND, VA

by Shanze Tahir, 15 Y-Press

A Ratnajyothi Patel has been a long-time supporter of Barack Obama, volunteering for both of his presidential campaigns. Though her family is in the middle of moving, she continues to make phone calls and go door-to-door on behalf of the president.

Ratnajyothi says she was inspired to volunteer to clear up some misinformation about Mr. Obama. "I felt that the media kept skewing his point of view and people were getting either biased information or information that was just plain misleading," she said. She believes that he has done a great job as president and hopes to see him win again this year.

Describe the issue you think is most pressing for our country. Why?

I think that each issue weighs equally on the country such as immigration, civil rights, health care—you name it. Right now, I think the most important thing that we as a country need to tackle is the divide between parties. They are so focused on party loyalty. Both Democrats and Republicans are guilty of this.

I think that instead of relying on party loyalty, we need to shut up and focus on how we are going to fix the deficit and create jobs. Both parties need to settle their differences, learn to

act like adults, and compromise. According to researchers, youth voter turnout increased from 2004 to 2008; however, fewer youth are expected to turn out for this year's election.

Why do you think that is?

I think that young people are tired. They're tired of not being taken seriously. They're tired of political parties and candidates who don't care about them. They're tired of trying to get involved, and they're just not willing to try anymore. Granted, there are a lot of youth who do still care, but a lot of people I know just are sick and tired of being written off.

What advice would you give to other kids who want to get politically involved?

They need to ignore the "you're too young" attitude and go stand up for what they believe in. They need to show the world that they are worth listening to. This "you're too young" attitude will be around forever unless we show the world that we are worth listening to. In the end, we have to show adults that we are not too young.

CODY PHILIPS, 18, BEXLEY, OH

by Shanze Tahir, 15, Y-Press

Cody Philips started his involvement in politics because of a psychology class he took about two years ago. He says he became intrigued by human nature, and politics provides a way for him to learn more about how other people live.

Earlier this year, Philips began helping with the Obama campaign in Ohio, and what he has found is a lot of other families like his, struggling with the ups and downs of the economy.

He says Obama, and the Democratic Party in general, most share his viewpoint and values. "The world should be able to function for the greater good of society and not for profit," he said.

What is your primary responsibility with the Obama campaign?

Just making sure that people have a say. I mean, the whole idea of the Democrats right now, their whole strategy, is basically to get people to vote. The problem is, a lot of people who would vote Democratic have so much going on. They have two jobs. They have a kid, you know. There are a lot of things that they have to do to sustain their barely functioning personal economy. And so they don't get out to vote as much as conservative voters. According to researchers, the youth vote increased from 2004 to 2008, though fewer youth are expected to turn out for this year's election.

Why do you think this is?

It seems pretty obvious that Obama promised a lot of things, as any politician does, and he wasn't able to deliver on all of them. He promised to do something about the college loan crisis. That's a huge thing. But the congressional gridlock that has occurred has stopped him from doing such necessary actions.

What advice would you give to other kids who want to become politically involved?

Just definitely do your research. Always be ever striving to gain knowledge about the candidate that you support and issues that you support. And then gain knowledge about the other side as well.

I probably wish I would've paid attention earlier in my life so I could be more educated about the issues. I also wish I would have had a greater interest in history.

I want to be an engineer and I'm really big into math, so like I love math and I tend to see history as boring. But I kind of wish I didn't because that way I'd understand how history connects to the way people think nowadays.

*To get a youth perspective on the 2012 Presidential Elections, WKCD has teamed up with the youth-led news bureau, **Y-Press** (www.ypress.org), based in Indianapolis. Originally part of the Children's Express, Y-Press has nurtured young journalists for more than 20 years. Their stories and articles—on local, national, and global topics—appear every other week in the Indianapolis Star. The Y-Press web site is updated regularly and encourages external submissions and comments about youth-written stories and reviews.*

Since June '12, Y-Press reporters have posted stories about the campaign, the candidates, and youth perspectives on the political process profile. They won press passes to both the Republican and Democrat National Conventions this August and September, and filed more than 20 reporter notebooks, radio interviews for PRX, and audio slideshows. And they have tracked down and interviewed almost two dozen young political activists—profiled here.

*Y-Press has been the star player in WKCD's "**Youth on the Trail 2012**" (www.whatkidscando.org/youth_on_the_trail_2012/index.html)*