



**ELECTION
COVERAGE**

Profiles of Young Activists

by Y-Press

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BACKGROUND

For almost ten years, the independent, youth-led news bureau Y-Press has brought a youth voice and beat to pressing issues of the day. Headquartered in Indianapolis, under the roof of the *Indianapolis Star*, Y-Press was originally part of Children's Express.

In the fall of '07, WKCD recruited Y-Press to cover the 2008 Presidential Election from a youth perspective. Their articles and audio commentaries have appeared regularly on the WKCD website for the past seven months.

As part of their work, Y-Press youth journalists also scoured the country for politically active teens who had thrown themselves into this year's Presidential Election and who had remarkable stories to share. Using the Internet, social networking sites, and word of mouth, Y-Pressers followed every lead they got. When they found a strong prospect, they interviewed her or him by phone, and then created the written profiles you will find on the pages that follow. They completed 36 profiles in all (see http://www.wkcd.org/youth_on_the_trail/y-press_intro.html). Here we share roughly half of them.

These young activists defy the notion that today's teens lack interest in politics. While most are too young to vote, they have still thrown their hearts and hats into the political ring.

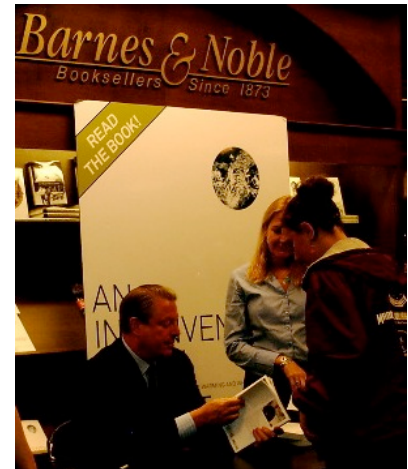
They should inspire all of us!

**By Paul Winston, 16, Y-Press
Shoshana Akabas, 16
New York City, N.Y.**



Shoshana Akabas is editor in chief of *Political Fire*, a political newspaper at Stuyvesant High School, a renowned public school in New York. She hasn't always been interested in politics — a few years ago, she was pretty apathetic even though both of her older brothers — Tal and Shai Akabas — were editors on the newspaper. They encouraged her to read about the issues, and she found that the more she knew, the more involved she wanted to be.

Shoshana was the driving force behind *Political Fire's* Web site earlier in the school year. Because of some financial concerns with the printed newspaper, the then-editor in chief wanted to delay the launch of the Web site, www.stuypoliticalfire.com. Shoshana pressed on and not only launched the Web site but has gained the editorship, too. "It has been very successful and has many obvious advantages over the printed newspaper (no lack of space, no strict deadlines, no cost, etc.)," she wrote in an e-mail. "This goes to show: If you care about something, take charge!"



What do you consider your biggest success with *Political Fire*?

Probably the amount of votes we got on our site poll in the first week. I was really shocked at how many people wanted their voices heard. I'd estimate about 100. I was under the impression that because people didn't know about the issues, they wouldn't care. That proved to be false. I have found that people are willing and even want to learn and form their own opinions about political issues. They only need the right resources.

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

Just start reading. Read up on the hot topics — there are tons of articles on the Internet. Educate yourself on the big issues, figure out where you stand and go from there.

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

Anything environmental. This is one area where our legislation is seriously lacking. We have one of the lowest auto efficiency standards in the world. Tighter recycling regulations need to be passed. More forest areas need to be preserved. Without these changes, our environment faces serious danger.

**By Becky Mangan, 12, Y-Press
Raheel Anwer, 16
Chicago, Illinois**

Raheel Anwer joined the Mikva Challenge Club at Amundsen High School in Chicago without knowing that it would take him to New Hampshire, standing next to Hillary and Chelsea Clinton.

The club Raheel joined is part of a project that helps teachers start clubs to give students a civics education. It began in 1997 as a tribute to Abner Mikva, a former congressman and judge and now senior director and visiting professor at the Edwin F. Mandel Legal Aid Clinic at the University of Chicago. More than 2,000 students are involved in the challenge this year.

Raheel was one of five students from his club (and among 60 from the Chicago area) selected to go on an all-expense-paid campaign trip to New Hampshire. Among his jobs were holding signs, canvassing neighborhoods, knocking on doors and making phone calls.

What got you involved in politics?

It's just thanks to the Mikva program, you know. It's really gotten me involved in the political process. If it wasn't for Mikva, I don't think I would've ever gotten involved as much as I am right now. So I'm really glad and it's helping me out a lot.

What was best response you got while you were campaigning?

While I was working in New Hampshire at the Hillary campaign office, this lady came up and she said, "I'm really glad that I see young people like you guys involved in this type of program, you know. It shows us that you guys really, really care."

If you could talk with the candidates about any issue, what would it be?

It would be (about) college grants because I'm a sophomore, and in the future I am definitely looking forward to going to college, you know, and college tuition is increasing rapidly every year.

Who do you think will win the election?

That is a hard question, but I think that Hillary has really good chances of winning because of the support from Bill Clinton, you know. I can see that a lot of people like Bill, so they're hoping the same with Hillary.

By Jonathan Gainer, 16, Y-Press
Gavin Bauer, 18
Portland, ME

It took a while, but the [Blunt Youth Radio Project](#) has helped Gavin Bauer find his voice. Gavin joined Blunt Radio his freshman year but didn't really get involved until this year. Started in 1994, the project produces a weekly call-in talk show that airs Monday nights from 7:30 to 8:30 in the greater Portland area. The subjects range widely, from teen motherhood, to voting, to suggestive language.

Besides reporting and engineering for shows, Gavin has explored a variety of topics for the program, including homelessness and the Iraq War. He also is involved in politics on a



personal level. During the 2004 elections, he volunteered with the Kerry campaign and has helped the Obama campaign during the Maine primary.

What would you consider your biggest success on the radio?

The first time I had a feature on the radio and I could hear my own voice and my family heard it, that was really exciting.

What are some of the problems facing youth in your area?

I know several high school dropouts, and they just really aren't given a lot of options. The minimum wage is really low; that's a huge problem for a lot of people, especially when teens drop out of high school and they start entering adulthood and they have no opportunities to ever make more than minimum wage. Because as an adult, when you're paying taxes and you're trying to get an apartment or whatever, you really can't afford to live on minimum wage.

If you could talk to any candidate about any issue, what would you talk about?

I would definitely choose to talk to Obama because I think not only is he the candidate who I can connect most with, but he's the candidate who I hope wins the presidency.

It would definitely be hard to choose one issue. I have some pretty strong views on a lot of them — the environment, just the whole way our economy is working and our welfare system, and just things the government could be doing better. I think that all handguns should be illegal, as well as all machine guns and automatic guns.

According to Rock the Vote, this is the first year that leading Democratic candidates all have a youth director and a youth voter outreach program. What other things do you think that politicians or the parties can do to incorporate youth more?

I think they're doing a good job of the whole outreach aspect. It's hard to incorporate youth without kind of blatantly advertising to them. It's good that the videos get up on YouTube so kids who don't watch the news or watch the debates still get an idea of what their views are.

Also recently, I don't know if you have heard about this, but I heard from one of my friends that there's a competition for students who can make a 30-second film, a pro-Obama ad. And there is some sort of big scholarship or something for the winner.

Millie Cripe, 15, Y-Press
Heidi Bentley, 19
Mobile, AL

Anyone who knew Heidi Bentley wouldn't have guessed that she could play a significant role in a campaign to elect Tom Parker to the Alabama Supreme Court. Even the twins, Alex and Brett Harris, who delegated the tasks to her didn't know exactly who Heidi was. They thought she was her 24-year-old sister. But the self-described shy 17-year-old stepped far out of her comfort



zone, doing whatever work was necessary to help elect a justice whose message she believed in. Although she received support from her parents and is thankful for it, Heidi was the primary coordinator in any task delegated to her. She didn't come from a family that was active in politics, although her whole family supported Parker's campaign. She suggests that young people get involved by finding a candidate that they are passionate about, hearing them speak if possible, and then volunteering whenever possible.

What was your specific role in Tom Parker's campaign?

Basically my whole job was to help get information out in my area and try to influence voters' opinions. It was basically kind of just getting the vote out and I helped all our state, 60 individual counties, to set up meetings and I went to events and just helped represent the candidate, passed out flyers, shook hands...basically anything that involves getting the names out in public.



What made you support Tom Parker?

[My friends and I] went to his announcement of candidacy, and that was in Montgomery. So we went, my family went up there and we heard him speak, and I was just really impressed with the way he declared what he believed, and he had faith-based convictions that motivated his stands in areas of morality and the rights of unborn children and justice for criminals. And he was a real man of integrity. I just wanted to see him in power in the election.

What would you consider your biggest success in the election campaign?

Basically the biggest success about the campaign, I think, was that in the end he only lost by 22 points and he was out spent about eight to one... that's a significant amount. And I think it was mostly because he had so many dedicated people, a lot of which were young people, teenagers, who put so much into the campaign just 'cause they believed in it.

Do you see yourself being politically active in the future, doing any more campaigns?

Yeah, I think when there are candidates who I believe in strongly, I will give all I can to help them, and mostly that would be people who are morally, they stand on moral issues and are very strong about what they believe and convictions to do what is right and constitutional.

**By Katie Bolinger, 17, Y-Press
David Burstein, 19
Weston, Connecticut**

When David Burstein was in high school, it never occurred to him that politics might be irrelevant to his life. He grew up watching CNN and accompanying his parents in voting booths. Frustrated by the outcome of the 2004 election, he became passionate about showing young people the importance of voting and political involvement.

Now, four years later, David is a student at Haverford University in Pennsylvania and has appeared on various media outlets, including CSPAN and ABC World News Tonight, to talk about *18 in '08*, his short



documentary about youth involvement in politics. The film is aimed at 17- to 24-year-olds and attempts to show them that their vote can make a big difference in the 2008 election. It features a variety of politicians—Sens. John Kerry and Joe Lieberman among them—as well as other political activists and college students.

The film has its own Web site, www.18in08.com, and has spawned a nonprofit organization that shares its goals. This summer, David hopes to sponsor a presidential debate, embark on a university tour, and even launch a fashion campaign complete with T-shirts and bracelets in hopes of persuading young people that their votes matter.

How did you come up with the idea to make this movie?

It was sort of a response to the 2004 election, sitting around the next day after the returns came in, saying, you know, “Why are there so few young people that turn out? What could be done to really inspire and motivate people to participate in the process?”

What do you hope young people will get out of your film?

I hope they will be inspired, encouraged and want to participate. But it’s not just about registering to vote; it’s about long-term engagement in the political process.

If you could talk with the candidates about any issue, what would it be?

Jobs—I think that’s something that’s really important, especially with what’s going on right now with the economy. Fiscal responsibility also. In general, people have no idea what kind of debt we are racking up in this country, that when we are 30, 35, 40—no matter how successful we are—we’re going to have to suffer to pay it off. ... It’s not going to hurt our parents, but it’s going to hurt us.

**By Sarah Zabel, 15, Y-Press
Alex Christensen, 14, and Peter Christensen, 17
Escalante, Utah**

Peter Christensen, 17, and his brother Alex, 14, are from Escalante, Utah, a town of 818, according to the last census. While the boys enjoy outdoors activities such as fishing and hiking, they are both officers in the Garfield County Teen Age Republicans, a local chapter of the national TARs program.

The Garfield County chapter faces a unique challenge: It encompasses three high schools, each more than 60 miles apart. Nevertheless, the brothers’ TARs group has been voted the most outstanding TARs chapter in the nation five years in a row.

Ada Cox, the retired adult mentor of the group, says it is in large part because of the siblings’ efforts. “It makes me really glad because I was actually part of something that got recognition in the country. It’s just really special,” said Alex.

Alex will continue with the program, though Peter graduated from Escalante High School and plans to attend Southern Utah University. After studying for a year, he will serve a two-year mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.



Alex Christensen

When and why did you become politically involved?

When I was 12, my brother was the chairman of TARs [Teen Age Republicans] and he got me started. I was also active in Boy Scouts, and the service project there made me want to get more involved with the community and politics.

Describe your job in TARs and the responsibilities it entails.

I am the secretary, and what I'm supposed to do is to go to all the meetings and take notes. Then I assign people to do stuff like call the other TARs and tell them when the meetings are and what activities we're going to do soon.

What kinds of activities do the TARs do?

We help people get out to vote and then we'll do service projects. Last Christmas we helped raise money so that the soldiers in Iraq could buy cell phones and call home to their families for Christmas.

What is the most important issue to you and your peers that is being discussed by the candidates?

All the education stuff—the safe school policy and the No Child Left Behind act.

Peter Christensen

When and why did you start becoming politically involved?

In the 5th grade my teacher, Miss Bassett, helped me develop a love for history. As I continued to study history, I became interested in politics as well. This interest led me to joining TARs.

What do you consider your biggest success with TARs?

I think that the most important thing that TARs does is help teenagers prepare to become more aware voters. I think that the greatest success that my fellow students and I are now more prepared to go to the polls on Election Day in November.

How do you feel about working with your brother?

Alex and I are best friends and really close, so it is great to be able to work with him on anything. This last year we were the only active members at Escalante High School so we worked together on all of our activities. Now that I have graduated, Alex is the only active TARs member at EHS, but I know that he is ready to take on the challenges.

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

Don't be afraid to be involved if you see something that needs to be done. Don't wait around for someone else to do it. Do it yourself no matter who you are—you can make a difference.

**By Jordan Gaither, 17, Y-Press
Jose Juan Cruz, 15
Denver, CO**

Are you tired of being that kid who's always left on the outside of any conversation or group activity?

Jose Juan Cruz was before he joined YouthBiz in Denver. The organization was founded in Denver's Five-Points neighborhood by an adult activist and eight teens in 1992. YouthBiz has many programs to offer, including classes that teach teens how to run their own businesses.

Initially shy and quiet, Jose Juan is now a youth leader and teaches others about computers and their applications. His new self-confidence also compelled him to join the Mayor's Youth Commission, where youth take on various leadership roles in the community. For example, youth commissioners helped interview candidates for the school board last year.

How would you describe your work with YouthBiz?

I would describe my work with YouthBiz as a once-in-a-lifetime chance. Before YouthBiz I was the quiet kid in the corner and everyone wondered, "Who is that?" "Why don't they participate?" Now I'm a lot more outspoken. I actually talk more. I want to be known. YouthBiz gave me those leadership skills and also the people skills as well. I can get in front of a crowd.

What do you see as the most important issue of 2008?

I think it would be youth and jobs. I have recently heard the statistics that there's over 800 youth in Denver, Colorado, and only about 400 of those youth are getting hired and maybe not even 400. If youth want to get more involved in the community or the world and society, they can't because there's not enough programs. If we do want to get a job or something related to a job, maybe volunteer or entrepreneurship, we don't have experience because there's a lot of competition out there.

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

I think I would try to change the age requirement for working. I would try and change it to where you would have to be 16 years old to work. Nowadays 15-year-olds are growing way too fast and are maturing quicker.

Do you see yourself politically involved in the 2012 election?

I do see myself right now. In the Mayor's Youth Commission, we are empowering young voices who try to get involved with the community and make a better Denver. We run our own meetings. We have what we call co-chairs. We have an adult co-chair and a youth co-chair. We were trying to have one of the youth members write a speech to actually get involved with this year's DNC. We didn't really follow through with that because of the time commitment.

**By Jake Thornburgh, 14, Y-Press
Beth Foster, 17
Charlottesville, Virginia.**

As a teenager, Beth Foster has had an ongoing interest in politics. In 2005, she worked on the governor's campaign in Virginia, and then in 2006, she helped out in a congressional campaign.

Last year, she moved to the national arena. She joined the Barack Obama campaign and spent her summer in New Hampshire helping to set up the "ground operation" and knocking on doors and making calls. She returned during winter break, as campaigning became intense. "It was so close, it was voter contact all the time. We talked to voters all day, doing calls all day, canvassing all day. So, it was a crazy experience, but a great experience." She's also campaigned for Obama in Connecticut and Virginia.



Are you still helping out with the campaign?

Because I'm a senior in high school, I had to come back to school. If Senator Obama does get the nomination, I plan on doing stuff this summer and maybe taking a semester off of school to work for him on the general election.

What do you consider your biggest success as a campaigner?

If you look at the numbers, the wins in Connecticut and Virginia would be I guess the biggest success. I think personally working in New Hampshire was, even though we lost by two percentage points. I put so much time into New Hampshire. The towns that I actually worked in, we won those towns. We didn't win the whole state, but we won those towns. And so for me personally, I think that was my biggest success.

Why are you involved?

I probably would've worked in some capacity on the election for some candidate, but probably not have been as involved had it not been for Senator Obama. I heard him speak — it was almost exactly a year ago — last February in Virginia, and I was so impressed by what he had to say and I really believed in his message. It was one of those things where I felt I had to do something to get him elected.

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

When I first started, I was 14. It can seem so intimidating. You think, "I'm so dumb. What difference can I make?" But it makes such a huge difference, and you can do so much even as a 14-, 15-, 16- or 17-year-old. Youth is the driving force behind a lot of campaigns. Young people can do a lot of things that people who are older can't, just by working hard.

**By Jordan Denari, 17, Y-Press
Pryce Hadley, 18
Marquette, Michigan**

Despite living in Michigan's remote Upper Peninsula, Pryce Hadley has been able to maintain a high level of political activism.

At Marquette Senior High School, from which he just graduated, he participated in “We the People,” a nationwide competition in which students answer questions about U.S. government posed by government experts. His class traveled to Lansing for the state finals (where they won 5th place), and they not only got to visit the state capitol for the first time, but also were able to meet Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm and former presidential hopeful Mitt Romney.

Pryce has been politically active in presidential races as well. During the 2004 presidential election, he volunteered to paint murals on the windows and interior at Marquette’s Democratic Party headquarters. As the 2008 race geared up, he began advocating for John Edwards, whom he supported because of his commitment to fighting corporate power and lobbyists. He now plans to vote for Barack Obama and express his political beliefs through protest art with a punk twist.

Besides the fact that John Edwards, the candidate you were supporting, wasn’t on the ballot, why didn’t you participate in Michigan’s primary?

It was useless to vote because the primary votes weren’t going to count. Now Hillary is really advocating to have Michigan’s votes count because she was the only Democratic candidate on the ballot, so she obviously won ... but I really don’t think that is fair because the results would have been potentially different if Obama was also on the ballot.

Though you’ve supported Democratic candidates in this election, you still identify yourself as an Independent. Why?

I wouldn’t vote Democratic just to vote Democratic. Being from Michigan obviously we have different ideas about gun control than the average Democrat would. So I have some slightly conservative ideals about things like that, but the majority of my beliefs would be more liberal. I can’t totally side with all Democratic platforms and really can’t side with all Republican platforms, so I really like to have that choice.

Describe your political protest art and what you’re trying to convey through it.

I’ve made T-shirts with different slogans on them and illustrations of my take on political socialization—the way beliefs are processed and how we’re given certain beliefs. One T-shirt I have is people going on a conveyer belt and having beliefs kind of implanted in them. And then I’ve also done collages taking pictures of different politicians, and then expanding, drawing from them, and including little short sentences or fragments of my thoughts at the time.



What is one piece of advice you’d give to American youth who might not be as politically active?

Student and youth in general see politics as something that is beyond their grasp because they say, “Oh it’s just in Washington, D.C.” But really, it’s everywhere ‘cause that’s part of a divided government; it’s at every level and it’s on the local level as much as it’s on the national level. And it’s easy to get involved in local government.

Through nonprofits and other advocacy programs, you can really make changes that affect you and your community. If kids get involved at a local level, they’ll be more likely to advance to regional and state and national. ...I think that it’s really important for them to know that they can affect their current situation.

By Sarah Zabel, 15, Y-Press
Asher Heimermann, 14
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Why does this middle-schooler call himself Wisconsin's youth activist? At age 14, Asher Heimermann has a Web site (www.asherheimermann.com) with tens of thousands of visitors, a radio show that airs every week, and a voice that demands to be heard.

Asher began his political activism when his hometown of Sheboygan was debating the police department's future location. He was displeased with the fluctuating opinion of the mayor, so he began to speak out. Soon he started a Web site featuring his opinions on various issues, as well as a list of activism opportunities, a chat room where visitors could chat live with him, a personal profile, polls, a guestbook for comments and questions, and links to his past radio shows, which have included interviews with political figures and discussions of school events and issues.



What do you consider your biggest success?

I've had over 97,000 visitors to asherheimermann.com since it was started in early 2007. I think the advantages of me being in politics are pretty great. I got to meet State Senator Joe Leibham (a Republican) of Wisconsin. I've gotten to meet the mayor of my city. I've had communication between the city clerk, the company administrator, and I could go on and on. Being in politics has really changed my life.

What's the funniest thing someone has said to you about your work?

I don't know if it would be funny, but it's those negative attack ads or negative talks about my work in the community. Those people that are against my work come out and start attacking me based on my party affiliation, religion, and on and on. But it's those negative attacks that make me laugh. Those negative attacks will not hurt me. They will not hurt my supporters, because we are one America. We are not the red America. We are not the blue America. We are simply one America working for a better and stronger nation.

Which party do you believe will come out on top during the 2008 presidential elections?

Well, I would think the Democrats would, because we have had President Bush, George W. Bush, in office for eight years. I think America is thinking of a new direction, a new party and a new person to do the job and lead America forward. In my opinion, I think the American people want change. They strongly want change, because they're sick of seeing the same old person leading us in the wrong direction.

By Katie Bolinger, 17, Y-Press
Molly Kawahata, 17
Palo Alto, California

Molly Kawahata takes the term "campaign worker" to a whole new level. The high school senior rearranged her school schedule to have an earlier release in order to have more time to work as the national high school director for Sen. Barack Obama's presidential campaign. Weeks

before the Feb. 5 primaries, she put in hours before school as well as after, such is her commitment to the campaign.

Molly began working for Obama as the state's high school director soon after he announced his candidacy in February 2007, and by August California had the strongest high school campaign in the nation. Molly has since been promoted, and now she works to help organize similar programs in other states and to train others to run them.

As the primary season draws to a close, Molly is trying not to look too far ahead but instead is focusing on the few remaining state contests. However, she is also optimistic that Obama will prevail and win the Democratic Party nomination. Whatever happens, she says that she is sure she will continue working, though she knows the general election will be "very, very different."



Why have you decided to become so involved in this election?

This is such a historical election on so many different levels. The participation we're getting with young people ... the amount of new voters that have come into play, I mean, it's all so big. I think it's kind of hard just to be watching and not really involved in this process.

Has anyone given you advice while you've held this position?

There definitely have been a lot of incredible people I've gotten to work with who have given wonderful guidance and advice. They told us about things that have and haven't worked in other campaigns in which they've worked and in other organizing experiences, particularly on campuses. But I think it's important to stress that students have a lot of, I'm not going to say power, but a lot of freedom in this campaign to just kind of do what they think is best for the campaign and the best methods of reaching out and talking to other students.

What do you think has changed to allow young people to feel a part of the political process?

I think that for a very long time, because of past records -- young people not necessarily turning out to vote and their enthusiasm not really translating to the polls, as we've seen in previous elections -- politicians and campaigns just kind of disregarded that vote 'cause it wasn't something they could count on. I think what changed was that students acknowledged that problem and said, "We need students leading other students, and we need this to be truly student-run and that's how we'll make it successful."

Do you see yourself as remaining politically involved in the 2012 election?

Absolutely. I mean, I'm not planning on leaving the political process, I guess you could put it that way. I have loved what I've done, and I think it would be hard to sit out another election.

What advice would you give to other youth who want to get politically involved but don't know where to start?

Mainly, there's nobody that's going to hold your hand or tell you what's out there. It's really up to the student to find those opportunities because they do exist. I think just talking to people and using the resources that might be available to you locally can really help you get started, and then beyond that I think really just your own initiative and finding out what you want to do and therefore what's available to you.

**By Hrishikesh Deshpande, 12, Y-Press
Adam Lussier, 18
Ridgefield, Connecticut**

When Adam Lussier realized that he was nearing voting age, he decided to do some research on the presidential candidates. Like most teens, he headed straight to the Web, where he "stumbled upon" Ron Paul's Web site and liked what he read. A registered Democrat, Adam switched parties to vote for Paul in Connecticut's Super Tuesday primary.

But choosing a candidate was not enough. Lussier joined a 71-member meet-up group (<http://ronpaul.meetup.com/384/>), with whom he canvassed grassroots support and met with other Ron Paul supporters.

Although Paul suspended his campaign in early June, Lussier's support for the congressman has not waned. He plans to continue his political activism as he heads to Carnegie Mellon University in the fall, and he hopes to campaign for Paul in 2012.



What qualities do you look for in a candidate?

What I like about Ron Paul is that he's pretty straightforward, he doesn't really mince around words, and he understands how to follow the Constitution. So he's steadfast, that's the trait that I like.

Do you plan on supporting John McCain in the fall or will you write in Ron Paul?

I don't think that it's really worth it to vote for someone who has no chance of winning, just to make a statement. I'd rather use my vote to give one to Barack Obama.

What advice would you give to other kids who want to get politically involved but don't exactly know how?

The Internet is a resource for that because it's pretty easy to Google what you're looking for. I'd say that that's my No. 1 resource.

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

Right now, what I'd probably want to pass is legislation concerning the educational quality in America. I don't really like what George Bush has done with education and No Child Left Behind, so I'd want to implement some legislature to change the way that schools are evaluated.

What issue would you like the candidates to address?

I think my No. 1 issue would be following the Constitution. I would ask them what they have to think about some of the new, potentially unconstitutional powers that the government has, like some aspects of the Patriot Act that give the government surveillance powers that it has never had before.

**By Hrishi Deshpande, 12, Y-Press
Jonathan Lykes, 17
East Cleveland, Ohio**

Shaw High School senior Jonathan Lykes is not your typical high schooler. As a matter of fact, he was called an "overachiever" by The Columbus Dispatch. You see, for the past year, Jonathan has been helping to lead the Ohio Youth Agenda, a group of high school students throughout the state who gather yearly to promote issues that matter most to Ohio's youth.



In December, almost 200 teens gathered in Columbus to draw up the 2008 agenda, which calls for, among other things, more funding and services to schools to better prepare students for life afterward. (To check out the full agenda, go to www.myspace.com/ohioyouthvoices.) And soon, agenda members will lead assemblies in their schools to try to register every student who will be eligible to vote in November, as part of the nationwide "No Vote, No Voice" drive.

Can you please elaborate on the "No Vote, No Voice" campaign?

After we register all the students to vote in each county, we have a press event and pass on all the youth registration forms to the board of elections. So hopefully, just bringing youth together downtown at the board of elections will show that we are trying to defeat the stereotype that youth don't really care.

Are you doing anything with the 2008 presidential election and national stuff, or is it just mostly Ohio and regional?

We are non-partisan, so we don't take sides. (But) Ohio is a swing state, so if we can get 10,000 or 15,000 new youth voters in the state, that definitely give us the pull and puts us on the radar screen of a lot of these candidates.

According to MTV's Rock the Vote, this is the first year the leading Democratic candidates have youth directors and youth voter outreach programs. What do you think has changed to allow youth to feel part of the process?

I just think this is a big year once you start talking about change. I think that message of change is spreading throughout the country, and that is really going to make a difference of bringing the youth vote out. People start to get interested again and maybe think something does matter, maybe my vote isn't insignificant anymore.

**By David Glass, 17, Y-Press
Glenn McLaurin, 17
Garner, North Carolina**

Attending the University of North Carolina this fall, Glenn McLaurin has done much in the way of helping his community in Wake County, N.C. As an only child, his parents always gave him a forum. He thought if he had that opportunity in the family, he should have that in the community, too.

Glenn has worked hard to give other youth a voice. He's been involved in Teen Court, a restorative justice program that gives first-time juvenile offenders a second chance to have a

clean slate. He's also been involved in several local elections and is a member of the North Carolina Civic Consortium Committee, a youth board charged with increasing youth involvement in their communities. Last year, they organized a kids' vote, including a mock election, and they are working on establishing youth advisory groups at organizations in their communities that involve youth.

It was in that capacity that he approached his local 4H program. "I wrote to them hoping to find a way to make sure they really stayed in touch with the youth [and didn't just include] executives who really didn't have an idea of what it takes to be a teenager in today's world," he said.

He was so convincing that 4H ended up hiring him to be their youth leadership coordinator.

How long have you been doing this kind of work?

I've been involved in civic engagement opportunities for the past two years now, beginning with membership on the North Carolina Civic Education Consortium Committee. I've always been interested in ways to get youth more active, more involved in the community.



What has been your biggest accomplishment?

In terms of the community effort, I think probably my proudest moment has actually been my involvement in Teen Court. I'm there every other week often till 8:30 at night, and I'm working with these kids who have taken some wrong turns in their life, but have finally had an opportunity to turn things around and they need some support and some help. Every time I walk out of the courthouse doors, I realize that I've made a difference in somebody's life.

You mentioned that you've volunteered with some local campaigns. Are you also involved at the national level?

I found that working with local candidates is just easier and has a little bit more person-to-person contact. I would actually support a national candidate. I'm very excited about the election, about being able to vote. But I find local politics more engaging 'cause it is that much more personal.

Whom do you support for president?

Barack Obama. ... I was fortunate enough actually to hear both him and Hillary Clinton speak at a conference in North Carolina a few days before the primaries. When he speaks, I certainly feel that he is all about change.

**By Jake Thornburgh, 14, Y-Press
Raven Robinson, 17
New York City, NY**

At age 15, Raven Robinson decided that she wanted to pursue a career in public service, and she's been busy ever since. Not only has she held a series of leadership roles in her school's student government, she's been involved in several political activities as well.

For two years, she's been a member of Generation Engage, a nonprofit group that connects youth to political leaders and organizations so they can engage in "meaningful debate about the

future they will inherit.” She recruits new members for the organization and has participated in a video IChat with former Secretary of State Colin Powell.

Raven also is a blogger and board member for Girls in Government, an organization that encourages females of all ages to be engaged in politics, and she has interned in the offices of New York state Sen. Rubén Díaz Sr., where her favorite memory was sitting in a Senate session in Albany while a congestion pricing bill was discussed.

In the fall, Raven will be a freshman at City College in New York majoring in political science.

Why did you decide to get involved?

The reason I decided to get involved is because I used to go to a middle school (the Maritime Academy in the Bronx) that was mostly Caucasian students. The high school I went to was mostly minority students. I saw how things are different at two different facilities under the board of education due to location and even different races. I thought of how I wanted to change the things that go on not inside of schools, but in those communities, and I thought the only way to go into that was public service.

What are the best responses you’ve had to your work?

People compliment me about my dedication. A lot of students like politics, but they’re not ready to spend time on it. I am the kind of person who if you call me, I’ll e-mail you back, even if I am busy. I’ll call you back later.

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

More funding of schools in the urban environment is something that I will try to change, also poor reading levels and things like that, getting more tutors inside of schools instead of parents having to do that on their own outside of school.

Whom do you support for the presidential nomination?

I haven’t picked a candidate yet. Despite the fact that I can’t vote, I still want to have a candidate in mind. I am dedicated to politics. There’d be times I’d wake up in the middle of the night and I just turned on CNN to see what’s going on with the caucuses.

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

Don’t pick a party yet because you’re still young and you don’t want to limit yourself. Learn about the other political parties even though you might not think you agree with them. Don’t limit yourself to a person because they’re Republican or Democratic. Intern for Republicans one summer, intern for a Democrat the next summer and see how they are different.

By Pratik Cherian, 16, Y-Press
Conor Rogers, 18
Ho-Ho-Kus, New Jersey

Four years ago, Conor Rogers saw a need for political volunteers and created the [New Jersey Teenage Republican Organization](#) to mobilize young people. Though it started out as a school club, it expanded to serve the county and then the state.

Conor's organization, which is entirely student-run, mobilizes young people ages 14-18 to form a volunteer base for all kinds of Republican campaigns, including local, state and national races. Earlier this year, some members went to Florida to campaign for Republican hopeful Rudy Guiliani. Efforts now are focused on the McCain campaign, where members are manning phone banks across the state.

Conor has always been interested in politics and plans to go to The George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

"Next year will be the first year in history that I'm not a part of the organization," he said. "So it'll be definitely different."

What was campaigning in Florida like?

That was a good experience. It was probably the best one that we've had as an organization. It was a lot of fun, a real hands-on campaign experience and stuff like that.

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

I would say if you want to be a leader, get a group of kids together. Volunteer. That's the first place to start. Give the support your party needs to win, and the party will support you back.

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

I would definitely fix the tax system. There needs to be major legislation that fixes the budget, everything from taxes to Social Security.

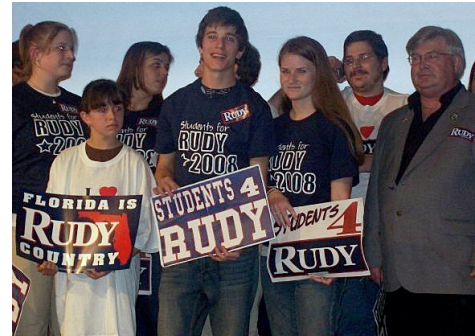
Who do you predict will win the election and why?

John McCain. I think the Democrats are going to have a split convention, and I think that's going to help the Republicans. I think Hillary Clinton's going to win the states heading into the convention, which is going to leave Barack Obama wounded.

Hillary Clinton would unify the conservative base against her. There's a lot of concern about the conservatives not coming out for John McCain. With Hillary Clinton as a nominee, they would certainly come out. A lot of people who are moderate Democrats who are turned off by her style will vote for McCain.

Jordan Denari, 17, Y-Press
Rachel Swanson, 15
Lexington, Kentucky

Fifteen-year-old Rachel Swanson has a history of political activism. Coming from a politically active family (her dad worked as a legislative aide for Iowa Sen. Tom Harkin) she's continuing the tradition at Bryan Station High School, where she is vice president of the Young Democrats club. Rachel's only a freshman, but she's helped the club accomplish a lot: They campaigned for the Democratic candidate for governor (Steve Beshear, who won the election); registered 18-year-olds to vote; and hosted movie



nights at the school featuring documentaries focused on issues of political interest, like *An Inconvenient Truth* and *Sicko*.

Rachel has embarked on a lot of political activism on her own, too. After finding out that Barack Obama—whom she supported even before his run for the presidency—was coming to speak in Lexington last August, she wanted to be involved. She signed up to be a ticket captain, knowing that if she sold 40 \$25 tickets to the event, she would be awarded a ticket—and a meeting with Obama!

Rachel, who was Obama's youngest ticket captain in the country, met her goal and was able to chat with the senator and stand behind him during his speech. Rachel's enthusiasm for Obama was apparent during our interview; she even slipped once, referring to him as "the president."

What first drew you to support Barack Obama?

I first heard Barack Obama on NPR, and I was just listening to the interview and he was just absolutely hilarious. And I just thought, "Wow, it's pretty cool that he can be serious at his job and also appeal to a lot of people."

What was the coolest thing about meeting Obama?

The rest of my heroes — Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, and Eleanor Roosevelt — are already dead. It was good to meet one that's alive.

How have your friends responded to your political activism?

They're completely bewildered why I would want to go into politics, why I would want to watch it on TV rather than just blow it off. In middle school, every time I talked about it, everybody was like, "What are you talking about?"

With the approaching election, what are the most important thing American kids need to remember?

The most important advice for people today is, "You don't have to have the same opinions as everyone else. You just have to have opinions." That's what runs our country.

**By David Glass, 17, Y-Press
Jimmy Van Eerden, 19
Stokesdale, North Carolina**

Jimmy Van Eerden is the oldest of 10 children, so he's used to taking the lead in projects. Spurred on by a friend's frustrations, he began holding voter registration drives by age 14. He's also involved in the youth advisory council of the School of Government at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he and other members are charged with promoting civic engagement in their schools and communities.

And one more thing: He's helping to start up a youth leadership organization called the I Am Foundation. The idea behind it is that youth need to go beyond identifying problems in our nation. "It's actually about focusing on each and every one of us individually, and if we do that, then that's when we can really change the political structure for the better," he said.



Jimmy plans to attend Grove City College in Pennsylvania in the fall and major in political science and philosophy on the pre-law track.

What inspired you to become politically active?

When I was about 13 or 14, I remember hearing one of my friends talk about politics, and he said something like, "I don't understand these politicians. Politics seem really pointless." And then later that night I went back home and talked with my dad a little bit, and I remember him talking about what Ronald Reagan said. He had talked about a shining city on a hill, and I thought to myself, "How can we preserve that when people aren't willing to be more involved in something as simple as voting and getting involved in the political process?"

You said that you've managed to get over 100 people registered to vote each year. How did you do it?

I worked every year on going to churches, going to civic organizations, going to other places and helping them to get registered to vote. You don't realize that a lot of people actually aren't even registered to vote, and those that are registered may want to change parties or may want to change positions. And so I think it's important to help them to be able to do that.

Whom do you support for president and why?

I support John McCain. His military record is very strong in terms of his sense of orders, in terms of our role in other countries, in international relations. But the other thing I like about John McCain, this is maybe the most important issue why I support him, is that in a lot of ways he has bucked the tide, has bucked tradition. Although he was really in with the Republican Party, he parted from them in many ways. And to me that's a sign of a person that's strong-minded, a person that's not willing just to cater to partisan behavior.

**By Max Gabovitch, 14, Y-Press
Megan Waggoner, 17
Palmer, Alaska**

Megan Waggoner's first love is the environment. She is active in Alaska Youth for Environmental Action and traveled to Washington, D.C., last year to attend the President's Environmental Youth Awards ceremony, which recognized her group for its environmental activism.

Megan also has been working with the Alaska chapter of Young Democrats for a little over a year because she believes the Democrats are most likely to share her concerns about climate change and conservation. She supports Barack Obama and hopes the next president adopts the Kyoto Protocol, whose objective is to reduce greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming.

If you could talk with the candidates about any issue, what would it be?

I would talk about the environment, I think, definitely energy security and climate change. Climate change is huge, and it definitely needs to be a subject that needs to be addressed and



needs to have action taken on, and I think that should be at the frontline of any candidate's campaign.

What's been the best response to your work from the public?

The best response is when young people are involved, (especially) seeing people who sometimes aren't even able to vote. I think that candidates are starting to see that youth are the ones who really will push their movement.

What is the funniest thing that you have done with your work?

Let's see, as far as Young Democrats go, I guess just standing out in line like 15 below and waving Obama signs. It's pretty fun, and you know that you're giving something up to be able to do that.

Do you see yourself politically involved in the 2012 election?

I do, yeah. I see myself being involved in every election until, you know, the day I can't do that anymore.

**By Jonathan Gainer, 16, Y-Press
Cory Washington, 18
Madison, MS**

In Mississippi, the summer of 1963 was a violent one — 30 black homes and 37 black churches were firebombed, and more than 80 civic activists were beaten. The following summer, about 40 Freedom Schools were opened, dedicated to creating "an educational experience for students which will make it possible for them to challenge the myths of our society, to perceive more clearly its realities, and to find alternatives — ultimately new directions for action," in the words of founder Charles Cobb. Though the program foundered through the years, it was reborn in 1992 with the support of the Children's Defense Fund.

This summer, Cory Washington volunteered at his local Freedom School in Jackson, MS. While the focus of the program has changed to include reading and the humanities, it continues to be rooted in political activism. Recently, Jackson Freedom School students held a voter drive where over 1,000 people were registered. They also held rallies to raise concerns about important issues in their community, such as health care, education and voting registration.

Cory feels that he has grown up in a "sheltered" life and may not deal with all of the issues that the average American teen might. But by being a local Freedom School intern, he says he sees firsthand what social and political issues face youth in his home state. He also feels he has given them something: "What I am bringing to the kids is that they can know that they can be educated and still have fun with life."

Could you explain the Freedom School?

It's for minority children. It helps them build their reading skills and helps them to learn more about their culture and their myths about different things, topics, about what has happened and what will happen.

Have you seen any personal benefits from teaching these kids?

Coming to Freedom School, where kids are less fortunate than I am, it gives me a better perspective about different things that go on in Mississippi and in the United States.

What are some of the issues important to the kids you work with?

Some of our kids are uninsured. I've been insured all my life. A lot of our kids are deprived or have emotional issues, and I've never had the problem of being deprived. And these kids coming out of Jackson Public Schools, their education level is not as high as someone who is in Madison County, where I live. The simple fact is that the teachers are being paid so much less for a workload that is so much more.

What issue concerns you today?

Right now an issue that I am probably facing would be the gas prices. It's rough trying to pay gas prices when they are so high.

What national issue do you feel strongly about?

I am going to tell you my view on universal health care. I don't believe in universal health care, and if I'm not mistaken, that's what the Democrats are leaning towards in this election. There are so many problems with that as far as doctors would be paid less, and the wait lists and everything would be more...that's one thing I don't agree with.