

Congress- The Presiding Officer

The role of the Presiding Officer is a unique one. No other event in Forensics even offers the opportunity to have such a position. Presiding Officers can only be elected, further adding to the uniqueness. Although it is an exclusive role, it is important to understand how being elected can increase the chances of winning. This article will present an overview of the responsibilities of the Presiding Officer and weigh the pros and cons which so often accompany this title.

In order to succeed in the role of Presiding Officer, it is first important to understand how this part impacts the rest of the senators or representatives. It is not an easy title to embody. Any failure on one's end will result in competitors getting very upset. But before even being able to work within the confines of this role, a speaker has to get nominated and elected first. Like every other part of Congress, getting nominated requires lobbying. In this case, all one needs to do is have one person nominate them to be Presiding Officer, and then they are officially on the ballot for election. When all of the nominations are complete, all nominees get the opportunity to stand and state why they are qualified to be the Presiding Officer and why they will do a better job than all other candidates. It is then that the election is held and all competitors get to vote for who they want to be the Presiding Officer. All it takes is a majority vote to win.

Once elected, the Presiding Officer will have the floor. It is imperative that the Presiding Officer understand this role because any blunders will be seen--this is a high-profile position. The responsibilities of the Presiding Officer are as follows: setting the calendar, choosing a chamber (open or closed), time keeping, keeping track of precedence, accepting motions, and allowing for questions. It can be very tricky because while the Presiding Officer is thinking, Congress still progresses forward. But no one can help or remind the Presiding Officer because they are the only one who has the authority to choose at which speed the chamber is conducted. Of the previous tasks, keeping precedence is probably the most difficult. The Presiding Officer not only has to mark each speaker in order, but as the tournament progresses they must be able to quickly assess who has the right to speak (precedence). In addition, toward the end of debate competitors normally want to know what the base is so they can stay as close to it as possible. The following formula is the simple mathematical equation for base: the number of speeches divided by the number of speakers. It is important to note that speeches are divided by speakers and not competitors. It does not matter how many people are present; it simply matters how many have spoken. The reason why base is so critical is that it creates an average for the number of speeches that should be given. If a speaker has given less than the base their chance of winning is near zero. If they are on base or a step above they have the best shot at making the board. Although there is no specific formula for making the board, it is important to create and exploit every chance available to succeed.

After all of the duties of the Presiding Officer are acknowledged and understood, it is easy to see why this is such a unique position. And if elected to this role the

Presiding Officer has a few advantages that other competitors do not. The first of these is publicity. Every time a competitor speaks, they give themselves a chance to be noticed by the judge and parliamentarian. But regardless of who speaks, the Presiding Officer always gets noticed because he or she sits in the front of the classroom the entire time and is in control. If the Presiding Officer runs the session smoothly, this will pay off when the judge determines who makes the board. A Presiding Officer that knows all the rules should do fine and have nothing to worry about concerning their performance.

Although the Presiding Officer is a role of unique responsibility, there are downsides that can accompany this title as well. The most obvious one would be lack of knowledge. If a speaker lobbies to become the Presiding Officer, and then reveals they cannot control a room or know few rules, then their odds of making the board are cut (they did not fulfill their role, created a disorganized Congress, and lobbied under false pretenses). Unless a speaker makes the board, their chance for placing is zero. There is one additional downside to being Presiding Officer. Even if a Presiding Officer does a flawless job, there is still a good chance they will have a room full of great speakers. If this is the case, then a perfect job still will not guarantee a place in the top two (which is essential for clinching a spot at the National qualifier). This is where knowledge of the room is crucial. When a speaker is an upperclassman, they have the luxury of knowing who has proven themselves over the years. If a speaker enters a room full of solid speakers, do not run for

Presiding Officer. This will severely limit the chance of winning. The best shot is to duke it out from the podium and challenge the opposition with questions.

The Presiding Office has a unique and challenging role in Student Congress. Although there is a lot to remember, the best ones will run an effective room and will almost always make the board. As a speaker gains experience and learns who the opposition is (and what they are capable of), a speaker becomes more capable of reading the room and knowing how to take full advantage of any opportunities available to win.