

Hello.

My name is Abigail Woods. I am twelve years old and I go to school at da Vinci Arts Middle School and I graduated from Opal Charter School. I live in Portland Oregon.

I recently got to participate in a trip to Washington DC to meet Oregon's State Representative Suzanne Bonamici as part of the "Take our Daughters to Congress" program. I wanted to participate in this amazing, once-in-a-lifetime experience because I have never done anything like this before and I thought that I might not have this opportunity again. I knew going on this trip would provide me other opportunities to put my voice out in the world so others can hear it. This is really important to me. One thing I took back with me is an understanding of how significant every aspect of Congress is and how everyone plays a very essential role—it's much like a family.

I think all students should have the opportunity to have similar experiences because this can open up new doors for them. There is really no better way to understand and feel the importance our voices have in the world then to be exposed to experiences where speaking and putting ideas forward is so valued. For me, visiting Washington DC, seeing a Congressional Hearing and this experience today in the State Legislature shows me the power of one person's voice. In addition to these experiences, I also learned from a young age how to debate and share ideas about our community in a respectful, safe environment. These experiences taught me that debating is fun and I also learned that students who don't have these opportunities are missing out. I learned that a kid's voice is valued when I had an editorial published in the Oregonian. That was very powerful for me and I want all kids to know that their voices can be heard too but some kids need help and need to be shown how this can be done.

Everyone should be able to have the option to have a civic education and learn how they can have a voice and be able to use it in their community. Teaching kids about these things are the kinds of experiences that open doors in a kid's life, especially those kids who don't get to go on trips to Washington DC. If all students have some sort of civics education, they may start small with ideas of how their voices can be heard but eventually these students could be running our country, all because of these programs and because they learned how to find ways for their voices to be heard in the world.

I don't want to be a politician, but that doesn't mean that I can't help inspire other children who want to be in our government. I want to solve problems in our community and make it better and one problem facing us right now is whether or not we should give all students an opportunity to learn more about something that they could be very good at. We have to put civics programs into ALL schools because we can't rely on the upper and high middle class to run our world. We need to give everyone an equal chance to put their voice into the air because their ideas are fresh and offer different perspectives. That is what we need going into the next generation.