

July 24, 1996

# Political Newcomer Wins Plum Role at a Convention

By DEAN NELSON

Jeannie Rhoads signed up for her campus Young Republicans Club, but it never had any meetings.

She is not a political science major, and does not feel that she is well informed about many national issues. She does not plan to run for office.

"I don't even know anyone who is political," she said.

Ms. Rhoads, 23, is, however, exactly who the Republican Party wants representing young people as the chief page of its national convention in San Diego next month.

"She is very typical," said Timothy Fitzpatrick of the party's press office here. "But she is not a junkie, so she adds a fresh perspective to our party."

Youth and youthfulness have been sore issues for the Republicans in this Presidential election, with much age-bashing of the 73-year-old presumed party nominee, Bob Dole. All of which has perhaps put a spotlight on this year's chief page.

"She is our official youth ambassador," Mr. Fitzpatrick said, "and can speak for her generation."

As a mass communications major at Point Loma Nazarene College, a four-year liberal arts institution in San Diego, Ms. Rhoads hopes to become a broadcast journalist. She is from Newark, Calif., between San Francisco and San Jose. Her father is a senior flight engineer for the California Air National Guard; her mother is a factory worker.

"I never thought I'd be involved in politics," Ms. Rhoads said. "I knew what the issues were on the surface, but not much about them."

Convention organizers first spotted Ms. Rhoads when her journalism class helped the San Diego Host Committee with a national media event earlier this year.

"She showed great leadership skill and had lots of ideas," said Garrett Peel, the convention's coordinator of youth services and events. "We encouraged her to apply for this position."

Ms. Rhoads said that when she was being interviewed for the position, she worried that she had talked her way out of the job.

"I told them I was registered as a Republican," she said, "but that I don't agree with the Republican Party about everything. I was very honest with them, and thought I had blown it. I said I was just your average young American who is concerned about the future."

As chief page, Ms. Rhoads will coordinate the work of 250 young people from all 50 states and the United States' territories (more than 1,000 applied) who will descend on San Diego after having paid \$325 plus travel expenses for the privilege of running errands and delivering messages. Ms. Rhoads will not be paid either, but she will have her expenses paid and, like the other pages, will get to meet lots of politicians.

Although the Democrats will have pages at their convention, there will be no one designated as chief page.

Ms. Rhoads's duties also include handling logistics for the convention's Youth Voters Program. Throughout the convention, a youth pavilion will be the site of talk shows, town meetings and entertainment as well as a mock convention, with Ms. Rhoads as one of the speakers. MTV will cover events from the youth pavilion on its news segments.

The Census Bureau reports that voter turnout is lowest among those 18 to 20 years old, with 38.5 percent voting in the 1992 Presidential election, and 33.2 percent voting in 1988. The 21-to-24-year-old age group had a turnout of 45.7 percent in 1992.

"Most people think my generation is lazy and uninformed," Ms. Rhoads said. "I don't think that's necessarily true. Mostly, they are just not involved in politics."