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18-year-old elected as US mayor

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13 November, 2005

THE ARTICLE

18-year-old elected as US mayor

An 18-year-old student has won a local election to become mayor of his hometown in the US state of Michigan. Michael Sessions won by the slenderest of margins - just two votes put him ahead of his only rival, the incumbent 51-year-old mayor. Mr. Sessions attributed his electoral success to the votes cast by his parents. He will now have to juggle schedules between attending school and fulfilling his civic duties. He will attend his school classes between 8am to 3pm and carry out his new job as the elected mayor of Hillsdale before dinner at 6pm. He aims to deliver on his campaign pledges of increasing the contingent of full-time firefighters from three to four, revitalizing the local economy and enabling townsfolk to air their views and grievances on town life.

Mr. Sessions was too young to enter the election when it was first announced – he turned 18 only in September, which meant he had just four weeks of campaigning. Although he is the youngest elected official in America, he cannot celebrate his success with champagne because he would be arrested for underage drinking. He ran for office with a budget of \$700, which he made from his summer job of selling toffee apples. His position is largely ceremonial and he will not get his own office. Instead, he will receive an annual stipend of \$3,600 to cover basic expenses. He starts his four-year position on November 21. Mr. Sessions has become an overnight celebrity since his victory and has already done the circuit of television chat show interviews.

WARM-UPS

1. BEING 18: In pairs / groups, discuss what life is like for an 18-year-old in your country. Do you think being 18 is one of the best stages of a person's life? Were /Are you happy being 18? Do you think today's 18-year-olds are different from those from a generation ago?

2. WORLD TEENAGERS: Are 18-year-olds the same all over the world? With your partner(s), discuss what you think the differences are between teenagers and their lifestyles in the following countries:

- The USA
- Saudi Arabia
- Japan
- India
- Kenya
- China
- Italy
- Iraq
- Liberia
- Brazil

3. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

Local elections / mayors / hometowns / rivals / parents / juggling schedules / dinner / firefighters / grievances / champagne / underage drinking / apples / celebrities

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

4. ELECTION: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word "election". Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

5. MAYORAL OPINIONS: Discuss the following opinions on 18-year-old mayors:

1. An 18-year-old should never be able to become an elected official.
2. A younger person would provide a fresh approach to politics.
3. Younger politicians better understand the often-overlooked needs of young people.
4. No one under the age of 30 should be allowed to run for public office.
5. The fact that an 18-year-old has won an election simply means the other candidates were of a poor quality.
6. Having an 18-year-old as mayor is an interesting experiment.
7. It could only happen in America.
8. An 18-year-old will take risks and make decisions older people are too afraid to. That is good.

6. YOUNG OR OLD? Have a quick debate with your partner. Is it better for an 18-year-old or an 80-year-old to become an elected official? Students A think an 18-year-old would be a better politician, Students B think and 80-year-old would be more able.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|--|-------|
| a. An 18-year-old has been elected mayor of New York City. | T / F |
| b. The teenager won by the slenderest of margins. | T / F |
| c. The newly elected mayor wants to teach people how to juggle. | T / F |
| d. The young mayor wants to hire one more firefighter for his town. | T / F |
| e. The 18-year-old campaigned solidly for six months. | T / F |
| f. The teenager was arrested at his victory party for underage drinking. | T / F |
| g. The new mayor gets an office ten times the size of his bedroom. | T / F |
| h. The young man wants to become a television chat show host. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| a. slenderest | became |
| b. incumbent | drink to |
| c. contingent | complaints |
| d. air | sitting |
| e. grievances | instant |
| f. turned | slimmest |
| g. official | allowance |
| h. celebrate | voice |
| i. stipend | civil servant |
| j. overnight | body |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| a. Sessions won by | ceremonial |
| b. put him ahead of his only rival, | the slenderest of margins |
| c. fulfilling | celebrity |
| d. deliver | and grievances on town life |
| e. enabling townsfolk to air their views | the incumbent 51-year-old mayor |
| f. arrested | chat show interviews |
| g. His position is largely | on his campaign pledges |
| h. he will receive an annual stipend of | for underage drinking |
| i. overnight | \$3,600 to cover basic expenses |
| j. the circuit of television | his civic duties |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the gaps in the text.

18-year-old elected as US mayor

An 18-year-old student has won a local election to become mayor of his hometown in the US state of Michigan. Michael Sessions won by the slenderest of _____ - just two votes put him ahead of his only rival, the _____ 51-year-old mayor. Mr. Sessions _____ his electoral success to the votes _____ by his parents. He will now have to juggle schedules between attending school and fulfilling his _____ duties. He will attend his school classes between 8am to 3pm and carry out his new job as the _____ mayor of Hillsdale before dinner at 6pm. He aims to deliver on his campaign pledges of increasing the _____ of full-time firefighters from three to four, _____ the local economy and enabling townsfolk to air their views and grievances on town life.

Mr. Sessions was too young to _____ the election when it was first announced – he turned 18 only in September, which _____ he had just four weeks of campaigning. Although he is the youngest elected official in America, he cannot celebrate his success with champagne because he would be arrested for _____ drinking. He _____ for office with a budget of \$700, which he made from his summer job of selling toffee apples. His position is largely _____ and he will not get his own office. Instead, he will receive an _____ stipend of \$3,600 to cover basic expenses. He starts his four-year position on November 21. Mr. Sessions has become an _____ celebrity since his victory and has already done the _____ of television chat show interviews.

cast
incumbent
contingent
elected
margins
revitalizing
attributed
civic
overnight
ran
annual
meant
circuit
ceremonial
enter
underage

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

18-year-old elected as US mayor

An 18-year-old student has won a _____ to become mayor of his hometown in the US state of Michigan. Michael Sessions won by the _____ of margins - just two votes put him ahead of his only rival, the _____ 51-year-old mayor. Mr. Sessions attributed his electoral success to the votes cast by his parents. He will now have to _____ schedules between attending school and _____ his civic duties. He will attend his school classes between 8am to 3pm and carry out his new job as the elected mayor of Hillsdale before dinner at 6pm. He aims to deliver on his campaign pledges of increasing the _____ of full-time firefighters from three to four, _____ the local economy and enabling townsfolk to air their views and _____ on town life.

Mr. Sessions was too young to enter the election when it was first _____ - he turned 18 only in September, _____ he had just four weeks of campaigning. Although he is the youngest elected official in America, he cannot celebrate his success with champagne because he would be arrested for _____ drinking. He ran for office with a budget of \$700, which he made from his summer job of selling toffee apples. His position is _____ ceremonial and he will not get his own office. Instead, he will receive an annual _____ of \$3,600 to cover basic expenses. He starts his four-year position on November 21. Mr. Sessions has become an overnight celebrity since his victory and has already done the _____ of television chat show interviews.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'local' and 'election'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the gap fill. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "18-YEAR-OLDS" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about teenagers and the contributions they can make to society.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- | | |
|--------------|-------------|
| • local | • announced |
| • margins | • official |
| • incumbent | • underage |
| • juggle | • largely |
| • pledges | • basic |
| • grievances | • circuit |

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. What were your initial thoughts when you read the headline?
- c. Would you vote for an 18-year-old to be mayor of your town?
- d. Do you think an 18-year-old has what it takes to be a successful mayor?
- e. What advantages are there in having a mayor who is just 18?
- f. Do you think an 18-year-old could ever become President of the USA?
- g. Who do you think would be a better US President, George W. Bush or Michael Sessions?
- h. How different do you think the world would be with an 18-year-old US President?
- i. What changes are needed in your town?
- j. How and where do you air your grievances about the problems in your daily life?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. What things do you think an 18-year-old would campaign for or against?
- d. Which is more important for the new mayor, finishing his homework or fulfilling his mayoral duties?
- e. What do you know about the mayor of your town?
- f. Would you like to see more young people enter political life?
- g. Do you think Michael Sessions should have been allowed to have a glass of champagne?
- h. Do you think you would make a good mayor in your town?
- i. What things do you have to juggle every day?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

18 OR 80? Would an 18-year-old or an 80-year-old be a better political leader? In pairs / groups, discuss the decisions each is likely to make on the following areas.

AREAS	18-YEAR-OLD'S DECISIONS	80-YEAR-OLD'S DECISIONS
The war on terror		
Education		
Taxation		
Pensions		
Crime		
Foreign policy		
Other _____		

- Change partners and show each other what you wrote.
- Which of the decisions do you agree with most?
- Would you vote for the teenager or the octogenarian?

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on the mayor of your town. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

3. ME FOR MAYOR: Make a poster outlining the things you want to do for your town if you became mayor. Describe the problems that currently exist in your town. Show your posters to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all want to do similar things?

4. LETTER: Write a letter to the newly elected 18-year-old mayor Michael Sessions. Tell him what you think of his election victory. Give him advice for the challenges he faces. Show what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all write about similar things or give similar advice?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

a. F b. T c. F d. T e. F f. F g. F h. F

SYNONYM MATCH:

a. slenderest	slimmest
b. incumbent	sitting
c. contingent	body
d. air	voice
e. grievances	complaints
f. turned	became
g. official	civil servant
h. celebrate	drink to
i. stipend	allowance
j. overnight	instant

PHRASE MATCH:

a. Sessions won by	the slenderest of margins
b. put him ahead of his only rival,	the incumbent 51-year-old mayor
c. fulfilling	his civic duties
d. deliver	on his campaign pledges
e. enabling townsfolk to air their views	and grievances on town life
f. arrested	for underage drinking
g. His position is largely	ceremonial
h. he will receive an annual stipend of	\$3,600 to cover basic expenses
i. overnight	celebrity
j. the circuit of television	chat show interviews

GAP FILL:

18-year-old elected as US mayor

An 18-year-old student has won a local election to become mayor of his hometown in the US state of Michigan. Michael Sessions won by the slenderest of **margins** - just two votes put him ahead of his only rival, the **incumbent** 51-year-old mayor. Mr. Sessions **attributed** his electoral success to the votes **cast** by his parents. He will now have to juggle schedules between attending school and fulfilling his **civic** duties. He will attend his school classes between 8am to 3pm and carry out his new job as the **elected** mayor of Hillsdale before dinner at 6pm. He aims to deliver on his campaign pledges of increasing the **contingent** of full-time firefighters from three to four, **revitalizing** the local economy and enabling townsfolk to air their views and grievances on town life.

Mr. Sessions was too young to **enter** the election when it was first announced – he turned 18 only in September, which **meant** he had just four weeks of campaigning. Although he is the youngest elected official in America, he cannot celebrate his success with champagne because he would be arrested for **underage** drinking. He **ran** for office with a budget of \$700, which he made from his summer job of selling toffee apples. His position is largely **ceremonial** and he will not get his own office. Instead, he will receive an **annual** stipend of \$3,600 to cover basic expenses. He starts his four-year position on November 21. Mr. Sessions has become an **overnight** celebrity since his victory and has already done the **circuit** of television chat show interviews.