

PRESS RELEASE

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Strong Jackson Showing at Speech & Debate National Tournament!

Though they wished they could be in Albuquerque, the Jackson Hole High School Speech and Debate team still made the best of the first ever online national tournament this last week. The team of 2019- 2020 represented well at nationals this year, having an unprecedented 11 qualifiers. Although all of the students had some great showings in preliminary rounds, the team's efforts were headlined by three advancing entries.

Sophomore William Aepli, competing at nationals for his second year, stole the show, accounting for two of the team's three advancing entries. After placing 6th in his congressional debate chamber and narrowly missing the break for the next round, he advanced to the 6th round of Extemporaneous Debate. This event allows students only 30 minutes to prepare after receiving the topic. Aepli went undefeated in preliminary rounds. Aepli went on to earn 12th place in the nation in Prepared Commentary, giving a 5-minute speech on the importance of the American Civil Liberties Union, honoring their recent 100th anniversary. Wyoming did well in commentary, with [Rock Springs High School's Makayla Kramer](#) placing 11th in the event.

Sophomore Lily Briggs joined Aepli in both Extemporaneous Debate and Congressional Debate, where she placed seventh in her chamber.

Juniors, and next year's team captains, Public Forum Debate partners, Joshua Hansen and Preston Harmon had impressive showings at nationals. They missed advancing to out-rounds by only three judge ballots. Hansen, a second-time national qualifier, went on to compete in Extemporaneous Debate where he made up the team's third advancing entry, and progressed the

furthest in this event of any Wyoming competitor. Like Aepli, Hansen went undefeated in preliminary rounds, but reached round 7, placing him in the top 63 in the nation. Hansen eventually fell to national runner-up Anna Reis, from St. Louis, Missouri. Points accrued at nationals propelled Hansen to earn a nod as a 2019-20 All-American, the first from JHHS since Aaron Trauner in 2017-18. Hansen goes into the 2020-21 season ranked #20 in the United States across all events. He's joined on the leaderboards by Aepli, who is ranked #50 with two years left to go. Aepli currently stands at #8 among the class of 2022.

Jackson qualified all four of their active seniors to the culminating tournament. River Gayton, who is headed to Chapman University in the fall, competed in Informative Speaking. After a dominant season in Wyoming, she narrowly missed advancing last week. Her second round was especially impressive, where both judges placed her first in the round. Maleah Tuttle, a soon to be freshman at Fort Lewis College, competed in Domestic Extemporaneous Speaking. She earned several first and second place rankings in preliminary rounds as well. This trip to nationals for Tuttle was especially impressive, as it marked her fourth consecutive year qualifying for the national tournament. Tuttle is Jackson's first ever four-time-qualifier. Warren Levy, one of the team's two captains from this past season and a second-time qualifier, was unable to attend the tournament. He was one of Wind River district's two competitors to qualify for nationals in two events: Lincoln-Douglas Debate, and Extemporaneous Speaking. Levy will attend Vanderbilt University in the fall. Fellow team captain, and soon to be Tufts University student, Darcy Mueller was one of three Jackson students to compete in World Schools Debate at nationals. World Schools brings together students from all across their state to compete together.. Mueller's team included students from Worland and Evanston.

Sophomore debate partners Jesiah Coates and Carter Worcester competed on the Wind River district's other World Schools team with students from Green River and Rock Springs. Their team was only one win away from advancing to out-rounds at the tournament. Both World Schools teams did earn wins over final round teams. Rounding out Jackson's [record-breaking 11-student roster at nationals](#) was sophomore Nayeli Hernandez-Lopez, who competed in Original Oratory, and had some second places in preliminary rounds. This event requires students to create and present a ten-minute speech on a world issue they are passionate about solving. Hernandez-Lopez spoke about the individual, community and economic impacts stemming from the U.S. response to immigration.

The Jackson Hole High School Speech and Debate team contributed to an all-around great year for Wyoming at the national tournament. Wyoming's best performance at nationals was by Cheyenne East High School's junior Jayden Roccaforte, who was crowned as the 2020 National Champion in Prose. Three Jackson students, Darcy Mueller, Preston Harmon and Josh Hansen, earned the NSDA Academic All-American award this year, joining last year's winners River Gayton and Warren Levy. Both of the Jackson coaches also received special recognition at the national tournament. Londe Gagnon was honored for earning her second diamond award and Peggy Gagnon was awarded her fourth diamond. Londe was selected to judge the final round of International Extemporaneous Speaking and Peggy was chosen to judge the finals of Lincoln-Douglas debate. Although the online tournament had its challenges, it was a rewarding and educational experience overall for the Jackson team.

