



Karen Ballard Photo

John McWalter, a high school student from Seattle, answers a question posed by a professor during a special session at the American University's Washington College of Law.

Aspiring jurists get brief brush with the law

D.C. forum gives teens close look at legal career

By **Denise Barnes**
The Washington Times

They come from Maine, Mississippi and states in-between. They are wealthy and not so wealthy, conservative, middle-of-the road and liberal. They are 352 of the country's best and brightest high school students. All have a deep interest in the law.

John Powers, 18, hopes to use the legal profession to create a more egalitarian world. Cataushiwa Marshall plans to wield her legal powers as a

judge, following in the footsteps of the late Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall. Andrea Knight wants to practice corporate litigation at a prestigious law firm.

These three are among the high school students representing 46 states who recently participated in a week-long program, "Law and the Constitution," put on by the National Youth Leadership Forum.

The program provides the students with an up-close look at the legal profession, its practitioners and the many choices available, depending on their interests. Immersion into the legal profession is about more than passionate oral arguments over statutes and their interpretations. It also is about friend-

ships, differences and learning to appreciate those differences.

Sessions were held at locations throughout the area, including the Best Western Arlington and Tower, where the students stayed.

"The best part of the program for me has been meeting all the new people. I've met students not only of different races and backgrounds but students with totally different perspectives," says Andrea, a 17-year-old senior who attends Central High School in Capitol Heights.

Andrea lives in Mitchellville, which she says has an almost even mix of blacks and whites. Her high school, on the other hand, is less diverse. The law program afforded her an opportunity to mix and mingle with students from other states and with various socioeconomic backgrounds and political views. She was comfortable and says, "It was really easy to fit in."

Corporate litigation is just one of the options available for those who choose a legal career. Like Cataushiwa, Andrea hopes not to plead cases, but to preside over them as a judge.

That's exactly what Robert McManis, 60, executive director of the National Youth Leadership Forum wants to hear.

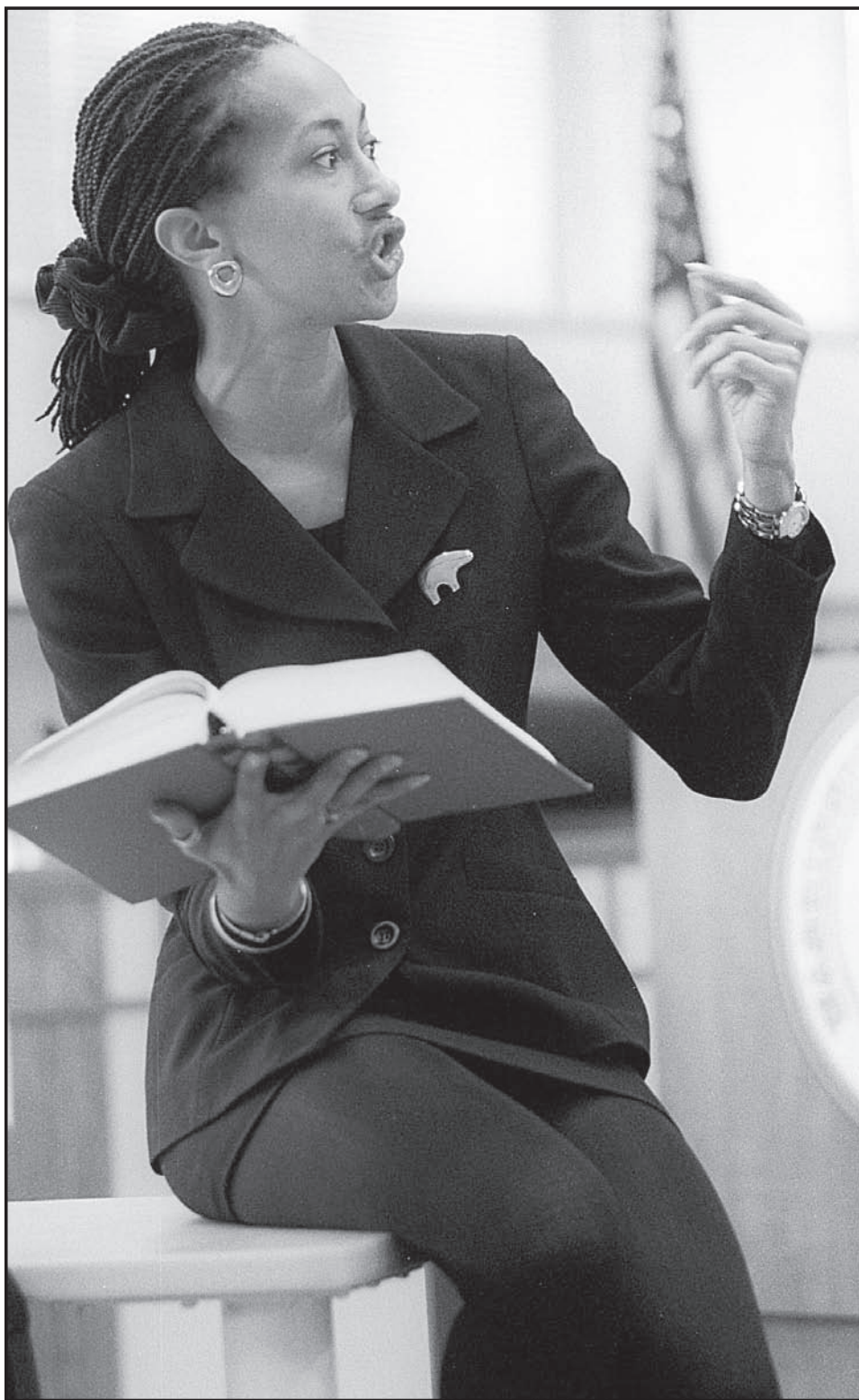
"This is a very important time in their lives, as they decide where they want to attend college — because they are all college-bound," Mr. McManis says.

"The 'Law and the Constitution' program helps them decide whether they are interested in pursuing a career in law."

This intensive study of the law has been held in Washington since 1995.

Organizers invited local and nationally known experts to moderate the forums. Andrew Goldfarb of the Neas Group, Wendy Shang of the American Bar Association and Jeffery Swyers of Koonz, McKenney, Johnson, DePaolis & Lightfoot presented the students with facts on different cases.

The week began with a discussion



Law professor Adrienne Davis teaches students during the AU program.

by Henry H. Perritt Jr., a nationally recognized expert in technology law and dean of the Chicago-Kent College of Law. Immediately after Mr. Perritt's 8 a.m. lecture, the students divided into groups of 90, and 16 faculty advisers

were made available to explain or clarify issues of the law whenever necessary.

The students visited four area law schools: the American University's Washington College of Law, the University of the District of Columbia

Law School, Howard University School of Law and the University of Maryland School of Law. This could be the students' first step toward obtaining a juris doctorate should they be accepted into a law program.

"The best part so far for me was attending the mock-law-school class at American University," says John Powers, a senior at Churchland High School in Portsmouth, Va.

"It made you think. The professor put you on the spot — you weren't spoon-fed," he says. John decided on a law career after watching "The Pelican Brief," which was based on a novel by John Grisham. Then he took an environmental-science class and got interested in the law's ability to change the world — helping people environmentally or just sticking up for the rights of the downtrodden, he says.

Throughout the week, students participated in legal-issues seminars dealing with some of the thorniest issues bedeviling society, including gun control, marijuana use for medicinal purposes, whether to try minors as adults and affirmative action.

Mr. Swyers, an associate who joined Koonz, McKenney this year, says juvenile-justice issues are being debated with vigor in certain sections of the wider community.

In the "Juvenile Justice" seminar, there was almost universal consensus among the groups of young people that minors should be tried as adults if they commit serious crimes.

Yet one compassionate youngster separated himself from the group's thinking by pointing out that some minors might become involved in criminal activities because of extenuating circumstances, such as having no food in the house.

His peers remained unmoved.