

GREENWICH

E N T E R T A I N M E N T

PRESENTS



In Theaters and on Amazon and Apple TV August 26.

Running Time: 86 minutes. Color. Language: English.

Written and Directed by
Jaron & Matthew Halmy

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SHORT SUMMARY

In the halls of California's Capitol, 4,000 teenagers run a fully functioning government complete with legislators, party bosses, and elections. Over four months, three candidates emerge in the race for the 72nd Youth Governor. With their peers watching their every word, these young candidates put together the unique mix of ambition, confidence, shamelessness, and pure motivation it takes to win.

LONG SUMMARY

The Youth Governor is the story of the candidacy, campaign, and election of the 72nd California Youth Governor. In the halls of California's Capitol, 4,000 teenagers run a fully functioning government complete with legislators, lobbyists, political party bosses, and elections. Over the course of four months, three candidates emerge from a field of 40. On the campaign trail, in their homes, and with their peers watching their every word, these young candidates put together the unique mix of ambition, confidence, shamelessness, and pure motivation it takes to win.

These young candidates see themselves as the heroic leaders that are nowhere around them. They feel burdened to solve the problems that their adult leaders have trouble addressing. Their story is a window into the world of young people who revere American democracy. The film follows these candidates as they throw themselves into the gauntlet of the electoral process.

This roller coaster of running for high office does not reveal itself through talking head interviews, but in the real-time dramatic experience of each young candidate. On the campaign trail, within their political parties, amongst their friends, in their homes with their families, and in their own quiet thoughts, we see the turmoil, the heartbreak, the elation, and a side of these young candidates that the American public rarely sees of its public servants: who they truly are.





TOPIC SUMMARY

How do seemingly ordinary people, in this case kids, put together the unique mix of ambition, confidence, shamelessness, and pure motivation it takes to run for office?

California YMCA Youth and Government (Y&G) is a statewide YMCA program that was founded in 1947. For 75 years, Y&G has immersed high school-aged kids in a robust and experiential government simulation program complete with a senate and assembly, lobbyists, appellate court, supreme court, department of education, committees, political parties, elections, to name a few elements. Each student picks a role (senator, judge, etc) and trains for that role at two training conferences in November and January, these conferences are where party primaries and general primaries happen for the youth governor candidates (and other candidates running for other elected positions). In February, during Presidents Day weekend, Y&G takes over the city of Sacramento, the Capitol building, the Supreme and Appellate Court buildings, and runs a functioning government for 5 days. At the end of Sacramento, the youth governor for the following year is elected in a live roll call caucus-style vote.

This is a story about candidacy.

The journey these candidates go on is a window into a world where young people reveal contemporary American notions of candidacy, debate, showmanship, gender, race, politics and policy. These topics do not reveal themselves through sit down interviews, but in the real time filming of their campaigns, with their campaign team and political parties, amongst their friends, and in their homes with their families.

At this pivotal time in public service, our goal is to hold a mirror up to the process of candidacy by showing these youth. They have a child-like faith in the notions of American representative democracy, and they see in themselves the heroic leaders that seem to be nowhere around them.

“We are desperate for leaders.”

--Gov. Gavin Newsom, addressing all 4,000 youth upon arriving at the Capitol.

In the charged up political arena of the California Youth and Government program, the candidates are passionate with their opinions, grand in their public declarations, and sharp in their campaigning. The stakes are high as they face the kind of scrutiny that any candidate for office would.



Do they have character? What do they truly believe? Who are they really?

In their personal lives, we reveal young people who are still figuring out who they are and what they believe in. This is a side of candidacy that the American public rarely gets to see of its public servants. This is a critically important juxtaposition.

ARTISTIC APPROACH

This is a vérité documentary. The approach was to have the lightest footprint possible as we captured these teens experiencing their lives at home and in the Youth and Government program. We built trust and relationships first before filming. Our personal connection to the program allowed us to understand the nuances of their experience. This familiarity allowed us to “fade” into the background while capturing authentic experiences.

We deployed a fly-on-the-wall approach along with strong and beautiful photography. We constantly strived to frame each person and location in an engaging and interesting way. The result is an immersive feel within the worlds of California Youth and Government. This immersion allows the viewer to enjoy the story on a visual as well as an emotional level. Since the world we are presenting is relatively unknown to the average viewer, a certain level of awe from the photography will heighten the magic and power of this governmental simulation.

We avoided sit-down interviews as much as possible. The goal from pre-production was “immersive interviews” only, pulling our characters into an interview in the moment to obtain real-time emotions and impressions. We did audio only interviews to build intimacy and introspection from our characters.





CREDITS

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Executive Producer

Jason Blum

Executive Producers

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Mary Lisio

Amanda Spain

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