

# The Birmingham News

## **Homewood teachers become students in Washington, D.C., New York City for summer**

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Homewood teachers Rhonda Rush and Mary Jane Coker intend to go a long way in their educational careers. This summer is no exception.

Rush heads to Washington, D.C., where the Homewood High AP government teacher will spend an intense week in a big classroom - Capitol Hill.

Coker is off to Manhattan, studying design and art education in "the most creative city ever," the Shades Cahaba Elementary art teacher said.

Both are prestigious, unconventional programs. The House Fellows Program, offered by the House Office of the Historian, focuses on history, practices and inner workings of House committees, said Anthony Wallis, research analyst at the Washington office.

"I wish I could have taken a program like this," Wallis said. "I'm one of those people who learned how a bill becomes a law from watching `Schoolhouse Rock.'"

House Fellows get realistic, unusual perspectives about how Congress works, he said. High school history, government and civics teachers apply through their congressional district representatives, Wallis said. "It's an honor to be chosen for the program, which has been a tremendous hit."

Candidates who apply must write a lesson plan. Rush chose a project that has proven to be a hit in Homewood.

"Students write a piece of federal legislation, join political parties, elect congressional leaders, and are assigned to committees," she said. "Committees determine which bills the full body will consider."

Classmates debate and vote on legislation while dressing, acting and thinking as members of Congress.

"They rise to the occasion," Rush said. "It never fails to create spirited debate. It is amazing to see the level of sophistication they bring."

Teens inspired by Rush's classes used the leadership skills gained there and started a student-run group, Homewood Students for Constitutional Reform, Rush said.