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Education Commissioner and Legislators Honor Student

MAY 30TH 2017 BY DEE LOFLIN

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Poplar Bluff, Missouri - Poplar Bluff High School senior Hamiz Mirza was among 15 select students to receive the Missouri Award for Outstanding Achievement in Citizenship on Monday, April 17, in Jefferson City.

The annual state honor—based on academic achievement, participation in extracurricular activities and service to the community—was established in 1989 as a provision under Senate Bill 198. Mirza will also be recognized on the American Bar Association’s Civics and Law Honor Roll.

“A lot of kids can ace government class, but it’s another thing to go out into the community and change lives,” said Mirza’s AP government teacher Mitch Davis during a special recognition Thursday, April 20, at the school board meeting.

Davis and R-I Superintendent Scott Dill presented Mirza with resolutions from the Missouri House of Representatives and Senate signed by Speaker Todd Richardson and Sen. Doug Libla, respectively.

Mirza, who has been accepted at St. Louis University, received straight A’s in several advanced social studies classes throughout his high school career, during which he served as captain of the speech and debate team, placing first last year in a district contest. This school year he helped found the Politics Club, a non-partisan student organization that

meets weekly, and was responsible for hosting a watch party attended by over 100 students on presidential election night.

“I would argue he has been successful in changing the dialogue in our school from hyperpartisan to more of a reflective, collegial atmosphere where it is now ‘cool’ to hear the other side’s views about the role and scope of government in our everyday lives,” wrote Davis on Mirza’s nomination form, which was also signed by PBHS Principal Mike Kiehne.

Perhaps even more meaningful, as Davis indicated to the Board of Education, Mirza volunteered over 200 hours to Smiles of Hope Dental Clinic, a nonprofit operation that began with one philanthropist making monthly clinical visits to a church. The clinic grew within several years to acquire about a dozen licensed dentists, treating more than 2,000 people and extracting over 6,000 teeth, for little to no cost to the patient.

Mirza was further inspired to spend 50 hours of his own, teaching proper dental care to children at churches and schools. He also volunteered 120 hours at the United Gospel Rescue Mission, along with splitting another 100 hours between hospital work and teaching swimming.

“While witnessing single mothers struggling to feed their children, a health care system that has failed many, and a country that is more divided and partisan than ever, it is easy to allow pessimism to leak into one’s own life,” wrote Mirza in a qualifying essay about citizenship. He went on to state: “As citizens of a representative democracy, the burden of ensuring our government is running properly doesn’t just lie with the people working in Washington – it relies on the work and involvement of everyday citizens who vote and raise awareness for what they believe is right.”

Pictured are PBHS instructor Mitch Davis (left) and R-I Superintendent Scott Dill (right) present Hamiz Mirza with official resolutions for his model citizenry during the school board meeting.

Photo and article submitted by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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