

Reports by JCUNA Leaders on the UNA-USA Leadership Summit, St. Louis,
November 14-16, 2025

See the photos at the end

From Jerry Anthony:

The UNA-USA leadership summit provided an excellent opportunity for several JCUNA board members to learn more about UNA-USA, meet leaders and volunteers from many UNA-USA chapters, and become more empowered to be effective ambassadors of UNA-USA's mission in Johnson County.

The event had a couple of pre-summit activities on Friday afternoon, primarily for youth leaders. The summit formally began with a black-tie reception on Friday evening at St. Louis City Hall. This building was completed in 1898, designed by architects Eckel & Mann, who were selected through a national design competition. Its profile evoked memories of a famous Parisian building, the Hotel de Ville, a French Renaissance-style structure. The interiors of the city hall, clad in marble and gold trim, provided a majestic setting for the opening ceremony.

Saturday had a packed schedule. The day's activities began with a short presentation by Farah Eck, the Managing Director of UNA-USA. She shared that about 190 attendees were at the summit. Carlos Suarez, the President of the UNA of St. Louis and host of the summit, took the podium after Farah and provided a brief overview of the programs. An excellent presentation on the history of St. Louis by Jody Sowell, the President of the Missouri Historical Society, followed Carlos' talk. Jody highlighted several fascinating nuggets of St. Louis' history, such as that in 1869, seventy US representatives met in St. Louis to discuss and petition for moving the nation's capital from Washington DC to St. Louis, that the James Eads bridge in St. Louis, built in 1874, is the oldest bridge across the Mississippi river, and that the first high school west of the Mississippi that Blacks could enroll in was set up in St. Louis. All this was before 10:00 am.

The rest of Saturday featured presentations organized into three tracks – chapter leadership, engaged volunteerism, and learning more about the UN. Jerry Anthony, one of the JCUNA attendees at the summit, chose to attend all presentations in the chapter leaders' track. One session in this track was focused on the need for good leadership to ensure a healthy chapter. Jerry had two key takeaways from this session – a) that JCUNA has had a great leadership team for a long time, and b) a quote attributed to Eleanor Roosevelt: "A good leader inspires confidence in the leader; a great leader inspires confidence among themselves." A second session in this track focused on ways to reduce volunteer burnout, while a third featured leadership lessons from 2-3 exemplary chapter

presidents. The session on the use of AI in chapter activities was perhaps the best-attended segment of the entire conference. In this, UNA-USA staff demonstrated how AI could be used to increase the impact of chapter activities. The Saturday schedule allowed attendees to meet with people in affinity groups in the evening. Jerry met with attendees from across the country interested in Climate Change and Global Warming. A key takeaway for Jerry from this was the work being done by the Orange County (CA) chapter; this chapter is developing a dashboard to document greenhouse gas emissions in Orange County that would help local decision-makers and the public track the emission impacts of different development decisions – something that perhaps JCUNA could adopt in the near future.

Sunday morning activities began with a closing plenary session. Rachel Bowman, the outgoing Executive Director of UNA-USA, provided a State of the UNA-USA report. In her report, she shared some details from the organization's new Strategic Plan. One key thrust of the strategic plan is to increase membership among people under 35 years of age. Another key thrust is to focus on advocacy for the UN in those districts whose Congressional representatives serve on Foreign Affairs (and related) committees.

In between the formal sessions and during lunch and dinner breaks, Jerry also managed to have one-on-one conversations with Rachel Bowman (outgoing Executive Director), Akash Patel (chair of the National Council), Carlos Suarez (President of the UNA chapter of St. Louis), and Jareth Lesch (UNA USA's Youth Observer at the UN). All of these conversations helped Jerry develop a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities for UNA-USA and JCUNA in the coming years.

After the summit ended at noon on Sunday, Jerry got the chance to visit two iconic St. Louis buildings: The Arch and the Wainwright Office building. The Arch is a magnificent steel-and-concrete structure, clad in metal, shimmering in the sun by day and seeming translucent at night. The Wainwright Building, designed by Louis Sullivan, was deemed the inspiration for all human-scale skyscrapers by Frank Lloyd Wright. Architecture scholars regard the Wainwright as one of the top 10 buildings that influenced the design of US office buildings.

So all in all, a very eventful summit trip.

From Lulu Rongerude:

The UNA USA leadership summit provided insights into the basis of advocacy: reframing an issue to spread awareness and understanding. Throughout the summit, attendees attended powerful talks with topics like advocacy and exploring the importance of the United States' involvement in the United Nations.

The first day, I was able to attend Career Connex, a panel aimed at students and others who may be interested in pursuing global careers. Afterward, JCUNA members attended a diplomatic reception at the city hall where we were able to connect with other UNA USA members and changemakers.

The following day, we attended panels ranging from topics on raising membership and raising awareness to youth engagement. Key speakers were Soon-Young Yoon, who works with the UN to advance women rights, Sophia Kianni, who is the youngest UN advocate in US history, and more. For me, the most valuable advice I was given was by Adela Ghadimi. She stated that when working within a community different from your own, do not prescribe what you think is the solution to what you think is the problem.

The final day, the summit closed with final remarks from the youth advocate Jarret James Latch and executive director Rachel Bowen Pittman before volunteering with the Little Angels Foundation in Saint Louis.

Below: Lulu with Lucas Threlfall, who is starting a chapter in Ohio, and Laura Henry, president of the UC Irvine Campus Chapter; a conference session; and UNA Executive Director Rachel Pittman (red dress) with chapter leaders including Meredith Gall, second from the right.

