

## Students praise Jobs for America's Graduates program

By Scott L. Miley | CNHI Statehouse Reporter Apr 12, 2018

INDIANAPOLIS — High school senior Sidney Shoaf was more than willing to talk about her dream job when Gov. Eric Holcomb asked about her future goals.

She plans to pursue a marketing track at IUPUI's Kelley School of Business.

"I'd like to go into business or something business-related where I can wear a pantsuit," she told Holcomb.

And she wants to serve on the board for Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG), a youth development school program for which Holcomb is national chairman.

"I feel like that would be amazing because JAG has changed my life and I want

to change other people's lives with JAG because it has helped me so much," Shoaf told the governor and about 20 others in Indianapolis for a board meeting.

Shoaf was recently named JAG's Outstanding Senior for Indiana. Beginning in her junior year, she learned valuable lessons from her high school JAG counselor Adam Ritz, she said.

"He was teaching things that have never been taught before in other classes, like resumes or how to apply for jobs, college applications, all that. You don't find that in math class or English class. You're not going to use the Pythagorean Theorem. I'm going to use that resume and I'm going to use those interview

lessons I've learned and apply them to actual life," she said.

And about seeking a job that requires pantsuits? "I love how they look.

Business women are so strong and I want to be a strong woman who can make a difference," said the 18-year-old.

After the meeting, Holcomb said, "It's truly amazing for me to see students who were unaware of this opportunity (JAG) and when asked to join raise their expectations to a level of 'I can do anything' and begin to dream. These are kids who had nightmares and now they are on their way to realizing their dream."

Just a few years ago, Shoaf's college pursuit

may have seemed a dream. Born into a family with five siblings and where her parents would divorce, she now lives with three siblings and her mother in Anderson and attends Pendleton Heights High School. She attends JAG with a class of 20 seniors.

JAG is geared to at-risk students and works to improve dropout rates, academic performance and youth unemployment. Nationally, JAG has served more than 1.2 million youth in its 38 years.

Indiana spends about \$8 million to pay costs for JAG staff in 137 schools; an additional \$5 million comes through partnerships. Holcomb wants to add 250 Hoosier schools to the program by 2024. Indiana's graduation rate for JAG students is 95 percent compared to the state's overall 87 percent graduation rate.

Ken Smith, president and CEO of the Virginia-based JAG, said the program follows students for a year after graduation to check on college or career attainment. About 43 percent enroll in post-secondary education.

Northview High School senior Parker Timberman, of Brazil, said he plans to become a special education teacher. Timberman, diagnosed with cerebral palsy, uses a wheelchair and has a canine companion, Herb.

"I know it's going to be hard but there's challenges with everything," Timberman said. "But I want to make a difference in young adults' and children's lives."

Kentucky has about 20 schools in the JAG program. Last year those schools challenged students to have no absences during a 30-day span; 66 percent of the

students accomplished the task.

"I do look at statistics, but these are human beings," Kentucky Gov. Matt Bevin, who attended the meeting, said. "But you can't measure the exponential impact you have on society of a transformed life — even how one life changes another life just within a family and how that spreads in a community."

Bevin recently sought \$4 million from the state legislature to expand the program but the funding was withdrawn. This week, Bevin vetoed the state's budget package.

Bevin added, "If you give a kid an opportunity, who knows where they'll go with it, who knows what they'll do with it?"