

MASKS, CONTINUED

However, Hutchinson said that this did not mean the wearing of masks in the state would cease. The governor added schools could continue mask requirements. In an April 1 email to students, Damphousse announced A-State would keep its mask mandate in place “for now.” “We believe that the mask mandate is what helped us do so well on our campus,” Damphousse said. “A lot of people are still nervous about being in crowds where people aren’t wearing their masks. That includes not just employees but students as well. We want to keep people’s comfort level high. People are used to wearing masks and so it’s not as big of

an inconvenience as it used to be because people are just used to it.” Damphousse said A-State may make some other adjustments in time to other things in the Return to Learn plan. “The Red W.O.L.F. Center might have some processes changed because we feel more comfortable with people playing intramural basketball for example that’s not happening now,” Damphousse said. “We want to keep things as similar as possible through the end of the semester so we don’t cause a bunch of confusion.” While Hutchinson also announced anyone 16 years and older in Arkansas is now eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine and while A-State held three vaccine

clinics from March 30 to April 1 for students, students will not be seen as fully vaccinated until after their second dose toward late in the semester. “By that time, the semester’s almost over,” Damphousse said. “So trying to do anything too dramatic after that with the last week and a half of the semester and finals week just doesn’t seem to be very practical or wise at this time. That’s why we decided to keep those kinds of things like the distancing and masking in place as long as possible.” Damphousse said the university has not set a date on when the mask mandate might be lifted on campus. However, A-State would continue to monitor what’s happening on campus and in

the community and will take a look at the mandate again in May around finals week. The chancellor said even now, people are not required to wear masks outside unless they cannot social distance. While he wears a mask everywhere he goes to set a good example, he said he thinks some people wear their mask outside around campus by themselves because they’re unsure of whether they have to or not. “I don’t think we’re going to be in a big hurry to change those (mandates),” Damphousse said. “We may remove it for example outside, but you have to wear it inside. That may be a step toward that. I see people walking across our campus wearing their mask even when they are by

themselves. We might be a little more encouraging of people not wearing masks outdoors.” **Importance of the vaccine in returning to normal** Damphousse said he’s concerned that as things get better in relation to the coronavirus, students and employees won’t get the vaccine. “We want to keep reminding people, as the governor did, that we still are in the midst of a crisis,” Damphousse said. “We should, if we’re able to, if we don’t have a belief system or health issue that limits us to get a vaccine, that we’ll take that to protect ourselves. Remember we wear the mask to protect other people, but the vaccine is to protect ourselves.” The chancellor said across

the country there’s been some hesitancy from people about getting the vaccine. Some people might not get the vaccine as COVID-19 cases decline, but he noted there has been an uptick of cases in some parts of the country. It’s a huge concern for Damphousse that the campus community gets the vaccine and the university is paying attention to how many students are getting the vaccine. “Once we have a sense that a sizable portion of students have been vaccinated, that will give us a lot more comfort in doing things like removing masks and removing the requirement of social distancing,” Damphousse said.

Ellie Mayberry and Logan Mitchell win SGA election, set to take office April 13

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After the Student Government Association election came to a close, Ellie Mayberry and Logan Mitchell emerged victorious. On March 18, Ellie Mayberry and Logan Mitchell became the president and vice president elect of SGA in a competitive election against two other campaigns: Keyon Atkins and Reed Middleton, and Molly Grace Williams and Sara Ledesma. Mayberry won the election by just 31 votes. Mayberry ended with 639 votes to Atkins’ 608 votes. Williams came in with 474 votes. “It was honestly incredible,” Mayberry said. “We went into the week knowing that we were going to have to work really hard to make it happen, and it was such a relief knowing that all of that hard work had paid off. I have definitely experienced my fair share of losses, so to win was a great feeling.” Mitchell also gave his perspective, as he said, “It was very surreal. We were standing in the SGA office waiting to hear the results, and when Blake (Moore) read our names as the winners, it was like a weight was lifted off my shoulders. It felt amazing knowing that all of the work and long hours we put in to make the campaign happen had paid off.” It wasn’t just the president and vice president. Other members of the upcoming staff shared their experiences as well. Gabriela Huerta, chief of staff, said she could not believe what transpired at the time, “I don’t think I can truly explain how I felt,” Huerta said. “It was almost as if I was dreaming because the whole campaign week was so much and we had such great competition that we didn’t know who was going to end up winning.” Asia Hervey, who will be serving as cultural diversity director, explained her experience. “After the results were announced, I experienced both extreme relief and shock. I

remember our Chief of Staff, Gabby Huerta, hugging me and grabbing my arm to run and greet Ellie and Logan,” Hervey said. Public Relations Director Maddyson Lamb commented on her reaction. “I was in complete utter shock and so thankful that all of our hard work paid off,” Lamb said. “Our staff became closer throughout the election process and I was so excited that we can continue to bond while serving over the course for the next year.” Casen May, secretary, actually learned about his campaign winning while he was at his job. “I was actually at work,” May said. “I was so confused as to why everyone was so excited in our group chat, but no one told me we won. I didn’t find out until about an hour after, then I was ecstatic and told all my coworkers.” But the biggest surprise came from Parliamentarian Carlee Bird who had less than enthusiastic expectations before the election results. “I was at work and I had completely convinced myself that morning that we had lost and was ready to be very respectful and plan my reaction for when all of my coworkers saw me,” Bird said. “But when Logan and Ellie’s name were announced, I was just in pure shock. I received so many texts and phone calls in that moment. It was definitely one of my favorite moments.” The Mayberry platform looks to bring improvement to the retail flex area, such as adding a new restaurant and GrubHub delivery, creating “dead week” before finals, new roommate notifications, increasing funding for the Registered Student Organizations through the Action Fund, and various campus enhancements. As far as any plans for any more proposals, Mayberry gave her explanation. “Our initial focus when we get into office is just on getting started with a lot of our platform points and then reaching out to others to see what other types of things people might need or want that we haven’t thought of. There are so many different events, issues and concerns

that might arise throughout the school year, and we look forward to working on those as they arise,” Mayberry said. “We will also be continuing work from the current administration and prior administrations to create a strong continuation and make sure that all of the hard work put in before us is not wasted or forgotten.” Bird plans to bring more welcoming experiences for students on campus. Bird said, “As students, our staff has mentioned a lot of instances that Arkansas State lacks a home feeling. It wasn’t a complete resolution but I hope to push for more areas designated for students to have for studying and entertainment and outdoor areas/spaces students can get away from that have the feeling of a classroom.” Of course, many members of the upcoming staff have had prior experiences at SGA, which does give them some knowledge and credibility for the upcoming senate. Mayberry is perhaps the most experienced member of the staff, serving for three years as a freshman senator for the Honors College, secretary under President Erika Tuck in 2019, and senator at-large this school year. During her time, Mayberry sponsored and cosponsored numerous resolutions and amendments, including the Swipe Out Hunger program she pushed for this year. Mitchell’s only experience at SGA was serving as class senator this academic year. He describes his experience while serving his SGA term. “This has been my only experience on SGA, and to be honest, it has been a challenge due to COVID,” Mitchell said. “This year has not looked like normal years, and that always makes things difficult. I believe that I have still gotten great experience that I can build on next year. This year has laid a solid foundation for me to continue to grow and be able to serve the students at A-State better.” Other experiences include Huerta serving as junior senator for one school year, along with being president of three student organizations and vice



PHOTO COURTESY OF ELLIE MAYBERRY

Ellie Mayberry’s staff from left to right: Maddyson Lamb, Asia Hervey, Logan Mitchell, Ellie Mayberry Casen May, Gabriela Huerta and Carlee Bird.

president in one organization. Hervey served as senator of College of Education and Behavioral Science from 2020-2021, as well secretary for the Diversity & Affirmative Action Committee at SGA and multicultural affairs ambassador for the Multicultural Center. Bird served as senator for the freshman and sophomore classes, along with working as the excursion chair, a new position designated to create events and plan trips for students. Campaigning was an intensive process. “We had our tent and table set up, and we started having to use backpacks to help hold the tent down,” Mayberry said. “Well one time, we weren’t prepared for the big gust of wind and it came in and took our tent flying and our table too. It took a few minutes to get it all situated again, but for the rest of the day we had somebody holding at least one leg of the tent pretty much the whole time.” May also shared his moment during the week, which happened while preparing for their campaign run. “Probably the most interesting of all the experiences I had whilst campaigning had to be during the midnight kickoff on campus. We listened to music and started chalking some of the sidewalks to spread the good word,” May said. “I was in the middle of drawing the best two toned ‘M’ you could think of when out of the shadows two of our UPD officers came up to us and asked us how we got so good

at graffiti. It was all a good laugh and definitely made our night.” Bird did reveal where their campaign slogan “Because You Matter” came from while interacting with students. “Before the campaign kicked off, we came up with our slogan ‘Because You Matter’. We wanted to reiterate that our job as a senate is to serve every student. During my conversation with students during the trial, I got a glimpse of how badly students want to be connected and want to better the campus. It makes our work so much more impactful,” Bird said. Of course, competition can create friction, especially around election season. But it was clear there were no hard feelings between the three campaigns. “I think we all recognized that we shared a lot of the same friends, and no matter who won, we were all going to be around each other and work together afterwards, so we all tried to be very friendly,” Mayberry said. “At the end of the day, I have good friends on the other tickets who were good friends before and are still good friends now, and I wouldn’t have wanted to do anything to jeopardize that.” This election was vastly different than previous years, as the campaigns were trying to reach for supporters during the COVID-19 pandemic. This presented huge challenges for the Mayberry/Mitchell staff. “It definitely changed a lot of things,” Mayberry said. “During the week, we had to rely a lot more on social media than we

did before. While social media has always been important, it had to take on a much bigger role to fill the gaps with the students we weren’t seeing physically on campus due to COVID. It also changed how we met with different student groups. All of the registered student organizations that we were able to meet with were over Zoom, which never would have been a thought before.” Even after winning, the campaign staff gave some advice for students who may be interested in SGA. “SGA has helped me grow in more ways than I thought I would at the beginning of my term,” Mitchell said. “It goes beyond the meetings that are held. I have created friendships that I would have never had, had it not been for SGA. I would encourage anyone who is on the fence about joining SGA to take the chance and you will watch yourself grow as a leader and an all-around person.” Mayberry also gave her advice, along with an upcoming opportunity to anyone who wants to join. “If you are interested, it’s not too late! We have around twenty-five seats that will be open to be filled at the coming meeting on April 13. Make sure to keep an eye on the SGA Instagram page to see if you qualify for one of the open seats,” Mayberry said. “SGA is a great way to give back to campus, represent your classmates, and have your voice heard.”