



21st Annual Youth Legislative Training Conference—2015

The 21st Annual AACCS Youth Legislative Training Conference was held July 13–17, 2015, and gave students from Christian schools across the nation a hands-on experience of the workings of Washington, DC. The report below from the AACCS Legislative Office highlights the events of the week.

Continuing the tradition of previous years, the 21st AACCS Youth Legislative Training Conference was an absolutely incredible week. Thirty-nine students from AACCS schools across the nation came together to experience five days of challenging speakers, tremendous opportunities, and even a mock Senate.

One highlight throughout the week was the variety of speakers invited to address the students. During the opening meeting, Dr. Keith Wiebe, president of AACCS, Mr. Jamison Coppola, AACCS legislative director, and Mr. Morton Blackwell, president and founder of the Leadership Institute, encouraged the students to view government as a ministry, with success coming only through dedication to prayer and principles, along with a grasp of the real nature of politics. A panel consisting of three young ladies who work in staff positions on the Hill shared their experiences as young people starting out in D.C. Their honest and practical answers to students' questions truly gave insight to the role a Christian can play in politics, no matter his job title.

To start a “Day on the Hill” on Tuesday, seven Members of Congress addressed the students to share their own testimonies of how their faith sets the foundation for their actions in office. By sharing their own unique experiences, each challenged and encouraged the students to be willing to follow the Lord's leading, to establish biblical principles in their own lives, and never to compromise those principles. The students not only had

the opportunity to ask questions of each speaker but also to pray with their leaders, as Dr. Wiebe led the group in prayer with each speaker.

Later in the week, the students heard from the Leadership Institute's Director of Coalitions J.C. Hernandez and Grassroots Trainer Christina Aiuto, who spoke on running campaigns and the use of digital media in the political field. During the Thursday night banquet, the students heard from their favorite speaker, Navy Chaplain LCDR Tavis Long. He challenged the students to follow the example of Daniel, also a political leader, who stood firmly for his God.

Not only did the students have great speakers, they also had incredible opportunities. For Tuesday's Day on the Hill, the students spent the afternoon meeting with their own Congressmen. The afternoon was replete with unexpected adventures as some students were able to have lunch with their Congressman, video tape presidential candidate Hillary Clinton as she walked by with her entourage, wave to Paul Ryan, speak to the U.N. Director of Foreign Policy, watch compelling arguments on both the House and Senate floors, and even see Representative Trey Gowdy and Senator Tim Scott compare sock designs! That night, the students finished their Day on the Hill with an after-hours tour of the Capitol, led by Representative Barry Loudermilk. His knowledge of and love for his country and its rich Christian history provided a fascinating and informative tour. After gazing at the beauty of the Rotunda, peering out at the beautiful view of the city from the Speaker's Balcony, and testing out the acoustics in Statuary Hall, the students finished the evening by sitting in the House Chamber as Representative Loudermilk made his final remarks.

There were also other tours for the students during the week. On Wednesday, the students visited the Library of Congress, where they were able to enjoy the special displays of the Bay Psalm Book and Thomas Jefferson's personal library. That evening, the students took a break from their busy schedule

and enjoyed a beautiful evening sitting on the steps of the Capitol while the United States Marine Band performed. Later in the week, the students went on a night monument tour led by Dr. Tim Schmig, executive director of the Michigan Association of Christian Schools. At each monument, Dr. Schmig shared interesting facts and anecdotes and pointed out the multiple biblical allusions seen particularly in the words of Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Jefferson. On Friday, the students toured Arlington National Cemetery. They were able to visit the gravesite of John F. Kennedy, the house of Robert E. Lee, and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, where four honor students, selected by a vote of the students and chaperones due to their testimony during the week, participated in a touching wreath-laying ceremony.

Yet even with the impressive array of speakers and opportunities, the week would not have been complete without the students' participation in the fun and educational mock Senate. Through the hours of meeting in committees and caucuses, preparing, discussing, and even pigeon-holing bills, the students truly came together as a group and forged lasting friendships. Mrs. Gail Nicholas, a veteran government teacher from Bob Jones Academy, directed the Senate as she worked with the students, taking them through the steps of the legislative process as they each acted out the role of a real-life Senator. The mock Senate culminated on Thursday with the final debates as the created bills were brought before the floor, argued, and then voted upon for a pass or fail. While the students tried to pass bills relating to education, marijuana, and veterans benefits, the seriousness of the day was lightened by the infamous "Fins Are Friends Act." Accompanied by laughter and the chants of "Shark bait! Hoo Haha," one student passed his bill to increase fines on shark poaching, much to the amusement of his fellow Senators. As the allotted time for debates ran out, the Democrats staged a dramatic filibuster to keep the majority Republicans from passing their bill on the Keystone Pipeline. Key participants were then recognized at that

evening's banquet, with awards for the top Democrat, top Republican, and top committee.

Unfortunately, the week did have to end. As the students went back to their home states on Friday, many not only expressed their delight in the week's events, experiences, and new friendships, but also expressed their desire to apply what they had learned to their futures. As most head off to their first year of college or their last year of high school, we pray their hearts continue to remain tender to the Lord's leading as they seek to serve Him.