

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HCPS Students Arrive in Style with Second Lady of the United States

Aberdeen High School students and teacher tour Johnson Space Center and Mission Control in Houston, TX with Second Lady of the United States

On Wednesday, March 2, 2016, three Aberdeen High School students and one teacher met Second Lady of the United States Dr. Jill Biden at the White House before traveling via Presidential motorcade to Andrew's Air Force Base where they boarded one of the highly customized Boeing 757 series aircraft used to transport the Vice President of the United States. They were flown to Houston, Texas where they toured the Johnson Space Center and Mission Control before welcoming astronauts back from a year-long space mission.

Students Kelly Pysh, Brandon Casquete, Sara Decker, the first non-presidential children to fly on Air Force Two, spent time with Dr. Biden and met Astronaut Scott Kelly upon his arrival back to the United States from NASA's Year Long Space Mission. The students took part in the celebration welcoming him home along with many others, including Scott Kelly's twin brother – and also an astronaut – Mark Kelly.

“Spending the day with Dr. Biden was a chance of a lifetime,” said Sara. “I had so much fun meeting Vice President Biden, flying on Air Force Two, touring NASA headquarters in Houston, meeting astronaut Scott Kelly, and so much more. Dr. Biden is such a kind and genuine person who truly wants to make a difference in the world and that is inspiring to me.”

“My time with Dr. Jill Biden was simply an amazing experience,” said Brandon. “She is a loving and caring person who is so passionate about her work. Learning about the mission from Mark Kelly himself has influenced my educational and career aspirations; I was inspired to pursue math or science. I feel so fortunate that the National Math & Science Initiative and Dr. Biden gave me this inspiring experience.”

“I was incredibly fortunate to be able to experience so many once-in-a-lifetime opportunities in just one day. I am very appreciative for NMSI, the White House, and my school for making this a reality. Dr. Biden was down to earth and energetic, and I am grateful to have spent a whole day with such an amazing person. I am happy that I found out that Mark Kelly liked the movie *Martian* (it's my favorite), and I am honored to have witnessed such a historic moment in space exploration,” shared Kelly.

Through the partnership Aberdeen High School has with the National Math and Science Initiative (NMSI), their excellent AP test scores, and a deep connection to military families in the community, the office of the Second Lady of the United States reached out to Ms. Yvonne Gabriel, Aberdeen High science teacher, with the invitation.

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“By virtue of a successful partnership with NMSI, three Aberdeen High School military students and I were given the opportunity and experience of a lifetime: to join Dr. Jill Biden on a mission to welcome Commander Scott Kelly for his return home from over a year in space (on the ISS),” said Ms. Gabriel. “We were invited to ride along with Dr. Biden in the executive jet, to join her in the VIP tour of the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas, and to participate in welcoming Commander Kelly home. We met so many astronauts and so many dedicated people who work for the White House and for NASA. Dr. Biden graciously included us in every introduction, presentation, and very personal tour. Her generosity and genuine care for our military and education was an honor to witness. She and her staff are incredible people, advocates, and role models. I will never forget the amazing people we met and am forever grateful to NMSI and Dr. Biden that we were blessed with this wonderful opportunity. And, oh by the way... we are definitely going to Mars!”

The National Math and Science Initiative (NMSI) mission is to improve student performance in the critical subjects of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). NMSI’s programs transform teaching, transform schools and are transforming education in the United States. The initiative is headquartered in Dallas, Texas.

Last year, Aberdeen High School students traveled to the Vice President’s residence to meet Vice President Joe Biden and to participate in a Joining Forces Event where they also met First Lady Michelle Obama and NASA Specialist Kay Hire.

Aberdeen High School Participant Biographies

Kelly Pysh, Grade 12

Kelly was born in Seoul, South Korea. She moved to Ft. Campbell, Kentucky at the age of nine to live with her aunt and uncle. They lovingly adopted both Kelly and her little sister soon after their move. In the three years of her stay at Ft. Campbell, her aunt supported her through learning English and adjusting to a new culture with her uncle deployed for more than two years. Shortly upon her uncle’s return, the family was stationed at Aberdeen Proving Ground. Kelly is now a senior at the Science and Mathematics Academy at Aberdeen High School. She does not know where she will be heading for college yet, but she is excited to hear acceptance decisions from the schools at the end of this month. She plans on double majoring in Economics and Music.

Kelly is the president of National Honor Society, the chapter co-founder and the co-president of Science National Honor Society, the co-president of Green Team, the secretary of Tri-M Music Honor Society, the captain of the Varsity Tennis team, and the section leader of A Cappella Choir. Her biggest passion is music, and she has been selected for All-County, All-State, and All-National Honor Choirs.

Kelly took seven AP classes in the past years, and she is currently taking four AP classes. Her favorite AP courses were AP Statistics and AP Environmental Science. She received 5s on AP English Literature and Composition and AP Calculus AB.

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Brandon Casquete, Grade 10

Brandon Casquete is a 16 year old sophomore at Aberdeen High School. He is of American Indian heritage and has been in a military family his whole life and he has been able to live and see some amazing countries. He has lived and matriculated in Cairo, Egypt and in Maryland, Kansas, and Georgia in The United States. He has a 3.1 grade point average and is in the Project Lead the Way Engineering Program that articulates with University of Maryland Baltimore County. He plans on taking Advanced Placement English, Biology, Chemistry, and Calculus AB over his next two years. He works as part of the Morning Announcements team and is a varsity swimmer.

Sara Decker, Grade 11

Sara Decker is a junior at Aberdeen High School. Sara was born in Sulzbach, Germany to a military family. After a year in Germany, she returned with her parents to the United States. Sara has lived in Germany, Minnesota, Kansas, Illinois, New York, and Maryland and has attended a total of nine schools. Sara is tracking to graduate with 10 AP classes and has a 4.0 unweighted GPA, putting her in the top 10% of her class. Sara is a cross country captain and a member of the track team as well as the National Honor Society. Sara is a member of all-county choir and all-county cross country. She is a three time state qualifier for track and cross country and holds a school record. Sara is a recipient of the Judith Resnick Award, an award granted to female juniors who excel in science and math. During the summer, Sara volunteers her time as a camp counselor. Sara is planning to major in biology in order to become a zoologist. She is planning to run in college. She currently lives in Havre de Grace, MD, with her dad, LTC Curt Decker; her mom, Sheila Decker; her three siblings, Anna, Joey, and Daniel; and her dog, Liesl.

Ms. Yvonne Gabriel, Science Teacher

Mrs. Gabriel is a National Board Certified science teacher with 20 years of experience. She teaches in the prestigious Mathematics & Science Academy at Aberdeen High School. She currently teaches AP Environmental Science and has a passing rate of 95% on the AP exam. She teaches Science Research & Technology to 11th and 12th grades and acts as a mentor for senior capstone projects. She also teaches Kinesiology and Sports Physiology at Aberdeen High School. She is a curriculum writer for Harford County Public Schools and serves as a pilot teacher for the Bring Your Own Technology Device Program. She is married to Joseph Gabriel and has a son, Tyler and a daughter, Hope. Her passions include teaching, learning, running, and being an ice hockey and soccer mom.

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Pictured from left to right: Brandon Casquete, Sara Decker, Kelly Pysh, and Yvonne Gabriel.



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