Briefing Journal  
Sunday January 18, 2004- Thursday January 22, 2004  

We just got here, and I am a little flustered, a little nervous, and a lot excited. It was so crazy to walk around the city earlier today and realize that I will be a part of this for the next four months. It’s really shocking to just be walking along and to glance down a street and see the Washington Monument in the distance. It’s so hard to believe that I am really here. I love everything about it though. I figured that to blend in you just have to walk with a purpose and look straight ahead, even though I want to look all around, spin in circles, and take pictures like the typical tourist that I am. Walking around Dupont Circle was a lot of fun, even though we got lost, because circles can be so confusing sometimes. But I am hanging out with my roomies and we are getting along so well. We went and found our internship sites together - only we could enjoy sightseeing in the rain. It was interesting because Margarita did not recognize the White House. I don’t blame her, it’s not like the White House is one of the most recognizable buildings in the world or anything. Ah well, I can tell that this is going to be a lot of fun :)  

The walking tour on Thursday was most excellent. Fran is so, for lack of a better word, cool! She has lived a fantastic life, not many people can say that they served in the front lines of World War II, marched with Martin Luther King, Jr., and was in China during Tiananmen Square. I think she is a history major’s dream. Plus she is so lively that she would be an extremely interesting person without all that amazing history. I think that she is so fun, and her walking tour, even though it was semi cold, was very interesting. The National Gallery is so fantastic, I can not believe how great it is, and I’ve only been in one of the rooms. I have found the place where I will spend my free time. The gift shop alone could take up an entire afternoon. I am just having such a great
time, although I am looking forward to Saturday when I can have a chance to sleep in. It’s so very sad but true, I am definitely not used to being a morning person. I am getting along so well with the entire group- we met for a happy hour and then went and got a great dinner. It’s really interesting because I thought that the group would have a lot of little cliques, but instead it is just the opposite, at least for me. I have been getting along with everyone really well, and I think that this is a close-knit group that will do well together.

Week 2- January 26-30

There isn’t very much to write about this week- thanks to the blasted snow. Being the nerd that I am, I was really looking forward to going to the Library of Congress. When I told Sara Jones how excited I was, she laughed at me and called me a gigantic nerd, but oh well, it’s more fun this way. However, ice storms prevented that trip, so then I became excited to go to the Falls Church Library (not as excited as going to the Library of Congress, but can you blame me?). My mind works in a nerdy way, so when I thought about going to the public library I got excited because I could check out some cool books to read. Well, that didn’t quite work out so well either, because it closed at 2. But I can’t say the trip was a total bust- the 4 Provinces of Ireland is a pretty sweet pub, and I am glad I was introduced to it. I am sure I will make many fond memories there.

Thursday was a day off where we were supposed to work on our papers. I did work on my paper, somewhat, but I really wanted to watch the movie Moulin Rouge, and because the only DVD player is on my computer, typing the paper took a temporary backseat. Going to the opening ceremonies (I feel like I am in the Olympics) was a lot of
fun. Not only was there free food, but I met some really cool people too! I have
determined that I am not the best networker in the world. I do not like to just talk to
someone for five minutes, ask for their card and leave. How impersonal. I tend to think
of myself as a bit smoother than that. If I find someone fun and interesting to talk to, I
will talk to them for a long time. I figure its better to make one excellent first impression
than to make a lot of mediocre first impressions. I do not want to be forgotten or to blend
into the crowd darnit! Ralph and Catherine Teti are two really excellent people, so
excellent that I invited them to happy hour. Catherine’s job sounds so excellent, I didn’t
even know what the GAO was until I talked to her. She is someone I definitely want to
keep in touch with and use as an excellent contact in the future.
I took a lot away from our talk with Steve Fought, the legislative director for Marcy Kaptur. Although a lot of what he said was his own, very liberal, opinion, he did bring up some really interesting points about elections, politics, and issues. I found him very engaging and enjoyed listening to him. As Brad would say, the “bleeding heart liberal” was a lot of fun to talk to.

A recent and controversial issue when we talked to Steve was President Bush’s 2005 budget. Being a democrat, it is easy to guess where Steve’s opinions laid. As opinionated as he was on the issue, he did talk about aspects of the budget that I had not known before. For instance, I had no idea that big programs, such as the Department of Defense, NASA, and education, all fall under discretionary spending, which only makes up 30% of the budget. 30%!!!!!! Many of the issues that will end up becoming huge campaign issues are not even the core of the deficit crisis. (Is over $500 billion of deficit considered a crisis?) The President has been criticized for NASA’s new budget, and granted, the money could be used much more in other places, but in my mind it was programs like NASA that caused such a huge deficit, when in fact this is not really the case, although the NASA budget did cost other programs, like the EPA and veteran’s benefits. Instead the budget deficit comes from mandatory spending, like Medicare and social security. I knew social security was always a subject of debate, but I don’t think I ever realized how huge it really was. President Bush’s plan to invest social security into the stockmarket does not seem as crazy I thought it did.
Steve may have put it best when he said “Washington is dysfunctional.” I do believe that there are people who do their best for the people, but at the same time, it seems that this country isn’t really going anywhere. The economy is making a small comeback, but it is still failing, spending is out of this world, No Child Left Behind, despite the best of intentions, is not helping the public school systems, and so many important choices are controlled by special interest groups. I really don’t know if changing a president can help the situation, I think it needs to be more like a change in perspective. As Steve said, the election will be won by whoever can convince the middle of the road voters, and I believe that these people have to be responsible for any change that will occur. I don’t think that this country should be run by the ultra-conservatives, religious right, gun toters, or the ultra-liberals. The majority of the people need to decide who will best fit the message of the future, and vote that way.

Thursday, February 5, 2004

Media day! The media and politics are intertwined, because almost no one would know a thing about politicians and issues without the media. And yet it is a double-edged sword, because as much as the media can make aware, it can also ruin a politician like Howard Dean and his scream. Starting our day with Chuck Conconi of the Washingtonian was a very good idea. He was lively and interesting and he and his family live fascinating lives. I look at people like him and wonder, “how can I get myself into a position like his?”, and my mind draws a huge blank. I really connected with his story about how he went home after originally coming to Washington, and just felt a pull to come back. Right now I am feeling a pull to stay here and just be here. I am
surrounded by wonderful things and experiences, and I cannot see myself being content in the future where I came from. I am also inspired by his life, because it seems as if he does things the way he wants to, and when he saw an opportunity, he went after it full force. I hope that I will be aware of what I want and where I want to be when opportunities present themselves. I would love to someday find myself in his position, where it’s “not about seeing, it’s about being seen.”

Len Downey of the Washington Post is the exact opposite of Chuck. It’s like the Frosted Mini-Wheats commercial, where one side is all wild and frosted, and the other side is calm and just plain wheat. I give him a lot of credit for spending an hour of his time with us. I can only imagine how busy he must be every single day, no vacations, no weekends, no summers off. Len’s career path was very interesting, it’s as if he found himself sooner than most, including me, and has spent his entire career at the Post. It just goes to show how much he must really and truly love his job, to be able to spend close to 30 years in the same office, day in and day out, and still be content. Of course, if I had made my way up to his position, I would extremely content with my situation as well. I give him credit for answering some of the questions the way he did, and not giving his opinion. It was like a separation of Church and State, and he has to be so careful not to let any of his or his reporter’s opinions enter their articles. He must be under a huge amount of stress, but he comes off as being calm and quiet. If I was in his position, I would be running around like a chicken with my head cut off, which is probably why I will never by the Executive Editor of the Washington Post.
Tuesday, February 10, 2004

How cool is the Congressional Research Service (CRS)?? What a fantastic and important job Dick Grimmet has. Like Len Downey, he is a man who has spent his entire life with the same organization. I think that a lot of where you go in this town does rely on who you know, but at the same time I think it also depends on luck, and having a job open up right in front of you at the right time. He is almost like a reporter, given a deadline, usually on extremely short notice, his work has to be based completely on fact with no room for error and without opinion. The only difference is that a reporter’s story goes out to a wide range of people, whereas Dick’s work is only seen by those who requested it. I find what he is and was working on absolutely fascinating. He has written a paper that is so incredibly important at this point in time on pre-emptive strikes in U.S. wartime history. What a fun nickname Mr. Pre-emption is! His findings are so important, so true, and at the same time so simple. All you have to do is be able to research in the right places. (It’s what we history majors learn to do) He found the first use of pre-emptive strike, which was found to be “necessary based on instant overwhelming action with no time for deliberation.” Taking this definition and applying to the war on Iraq does not add up. There is absolutely no doubt that Saddam Hussein is an evil man, but you can not run after someone with warning because he is bad. He deserves a horrible fate, but is it up to the U.S. to hand it to him? Under Webster’s definition of pre-emption, probably not. I think that Dick has an extremely difficult job. Not only does he work under a great deal of stress, but he has to be completely non-partisan. From his talk to us, I can make a pretty well educated guess as to what side he is on, but he has to present only facts and information to both sides of an issue. I
honestly do not know how I could be able to do that and at the same time not form my opinions or plan of action around what I have told the other side.

Off to see more of the Library of Congress we went. I was a little disappointed that I didn’t get the famous main reading room, but I hear I will see it soon, so I think I’ll be alright. I was absolutely amazed at how much I can do at the Library of Congress, and only on their internet!! There is such a plethora of information that I have no idea where to possibly start. However, Ken did an excellent job of going through everything and making the website a lot easier to navigate than if I was doing it on my own. However, I do apologize for my computer restarting, I accidentally kicked the plug out.

The first thing I thought when I entered Ralph Regula’s office was, “Holy Sh*@! Look at that view!” I would push my desk right up against the window if I had a view like that too. However, as soon as he started talking to us, all of my attention was directed to him. He is such a breath of fresh air in the world of politics. He was just so normal, living on a farm in the town where he grew up, worked as a schoolteacher. He is a good ol’ boy to the very core. However, what impressed me most was that he was nonpartisan, despite the fact that he is such a high-ranking Republican. He said, “My title is Representative,” and that he reflects his district, not his party. It was so nice that his political affiliation or drive for re-election do not fuel his votes, but instead the memory of his college sociology professor. He even goes as far as to openly admit when he thinks decisions made by his party are wrong. For instance, not agreeing with No Child Left Behind, as well as saying that he is “reluctant to clutter up the Constitution” when the issue of gay marriage was brought up. Even when asked about the upcoming election he started with phrase “I don’t want to sound political, but…” He tore apart John Kerry’s
hypocrisy about defending the ‘Common Man’ but then went back and said Cheney and Haliburton also had some bad vibes about them. He comes off as someone who really cares about his constituents, and will do all that he possibly can not just for them, but for everyone he can possibly help. I think that the world, not just Washington, should have more people like Ralph Regula.

Thursday February 12, 2004

Although it sucked that we could not talk to Congresswoman Kaptur (I really wanted to hear about the World War II Memorial), we had unbelievable substitutes. Michael and Doug from Dennis Kucinich’s office were absolutely phenomenal. On one level, we had some young guys come in and talk to a group of young college students. I thought that we could really connect, and that they could offer us some excellent and worthy advice about the working on Capitol Hill. I thought that we all connected on a different level than we could have if we were talking to a congressman. It was a very comfortable atmosphere, the guys were really open to our questions, and it was cool to realize that in three or four years we could be those guys in those positions.

On another level, I was very interested in listening to Michael’s story. He is interested in the same issues that I want to go into, he does research for Kucinich on Labor, education, and civil rights. My policy field of interest is family, education, and social policy. He gave me another career area to look into. Researching for a Congressman and having your work affect and reflect his beliefs must be a rewarding experience, despite the long hours. It definitely has given me another outlet to look into.
On a third and final level, these young men’s respect and admiration for Kucinich was incredibly contagious. Going into this briefing, all I knew was that Kucinich was a democrat for Ohio that was single and running for President. However, when leaving the briefing, I knew so much more about the Congressman and had the utmost respect for him. I love how he gets personally involved with his staff and his constituents, and will fight for what he believes in despite its popularity and future ridicule (think: Head Start bill and the poverty line). He is an ‘activist on the Hill,’ and the fact that he is not passive and really does give a damn mean a lot. I also really liked what they had to say about gay marriage. Although Mike and Doug did not want to put words into the Congressman’s mouth, I am fairly positive that they reflected his beliefs when they said that the Constitution is supposed to guarantee rights, not take them away. I was very impressed by that statement, by its truth and simplicity.

After Kucinich’s aides, we took a tour of the Capitol grounds. It was very interesting and very beautiful, however, my shoes were horrible and they alone made the second half of the day nearly unbearable! I can still picture myself limping slowly towards the metro station. Oh the horrors! Well, lesson learned, and I learned something new that day, well, besides the exact location where President Garfield was shot.

Tuesday, February 23, 2004

Tuesday was one of those days where you get to visit places that you never would have imagined being. For starters, we began the day at the White House. How cool is that? Walking by the building is fascinating enough, but to actually have the opportunity
to go inside was almost too good to be true. The tour was nice, but it was not exactly what I expected. I was really excited to see famous paintings, especially the portraits of John F. Kennedy and George Washington, and the décor was absolutely fabulous, but it just seemed so impersonal. It was like going through a house museum. It was crazy to think that people actually lived there and were probably somewhere upstairs as people traipse through their house every day. That aspect of the tour, combined with research I am doing at work, are showing me how very hectic and impersonal a President’s life really is. The project at work concerns Presidential travel, and so I am going through President and Mrs. Bush’s travel logs. There are days when he flies to three or four cities and then back to Washington. Even though he lives in one of the most revered and beautiful houses in the country, being the President is not all glamour and glory. I felt kind of sad by that. I loved the White House, I thought it was so elegant and I loved how each of the rooms was so different, but I feel bad for the President.

After the White House we went to the State Department. As an architectural wonder it is not the most exciting place we have been, but to know how powerful the people in that building are is pretty awesome. I also love places where we get free stuff, and the folders and cookies were pretty fun. Although the Afghanistan presentation ran a little long, I was left with an overall heightened interest in the State Department. I had never really considered a career there before we went. However, now that I know about the organization of the place, I think working there would be constantly interesting and would always be a learning experience. My major concern was the fact that I am not all that fluent in a foreign language, but I never knew that the State Department would pay you as you learn one. I love the idea of living abroad, and now that the language barrier
would be taken care of, I would be more than interested in delving into this further. Just one little problem: that pesky thing called the Foreign Service Exam. I have constructed a timetable in my mind, and am thinking about taking the Foreign Service Exam at the end of my first year of graduate school. I may as well just give it a try: you never what can happen if you take a chance.

Thursday, February 25, 2004

This has been a week of career thinking for yours truly. Ever since the Opening Reception I had had an interest in the GAO, but our visit there just cemented that interest. Once I found out that it wasn’t really about accounting, I was hooked. I was so impressed with the amount of effort that was put into making our visit interesting. Trying to get one speaker to come in at Brookings for us is hard enough for me, but Catherine managed to get herself, two other presenters, a panel of alums, and one of the most powerful people in Washington (the Comptroller General) to come and speak to us! Plus we got a free pen! I really feel that my degree in public policy could really get me a job there, and that it would prepare me for the work that I would get. I like the GAO because a lot of their areas work with domestic issues, like Rich Stana, working in Homeland Security and Justice, and that is what my concentration will be in graduate school. Also, working in the special investigations department would be really fun- it would be like I was a secret agent! At a lot of the places we have visited I have had the thought that “it would be so cool to work here!” The GAO was one of the first places where I could actually see myself working when I graduate.
After our forced march across Washington, where luckily I was smart enough to wear comfortable shoes, we met with Congressman Tim Ryan. I would have to say that he is by far the best politician that we have met on the trip. Maybe it is because he is so young and new to the system, or maybe it is just because we did not talk politics the entire time. I love Washington, but sometimes politics rules over too many conversations. I really loved Congressman Ryan’s talk because it was more about life in general, and it could be taken to mean my life, or his life, and any other person’s life on this trip. Basically gave the follow your dream inspirational speech, but emphasized the point that things aren’t always going to be stellar. There will be times when things just, well, suck. But the important thing is to learn from them and move on. It meant a lot for me because I am at a point in my own life where I don’t quite know what I will end up doing. Part of me really envies the people who are getting jobs right out of this, but part of me knows that I shouldn’t worry because I am going to graduate school. Either way, I am at a point of major indecision in my life, where I don’t really have a specific path that I know I will take. It is comforting to hear reassurance that you don’t always have to know what exactly is going to happen to you, and you will still turn out alright. This is especially comforting coming from someone who has made it. I loved Tim Ryan’s talk, but I would have liked it even if he had the most boring talk this side of the Mississippi, because he is a Dave Matthews fan.

Tuesday, March 2, 2004

Today we went to the Department of Justice Office of International Affairs and spoke with Tom Burrows, a Kent State Alum. Based on his job description, his life
sounds pretty interesting. He facilitates international cooperation in extraditions and mutual legal assistance. I never knew how complicated things became when trying to extradite a criminal back to the U.S. I had always assumed that if there was a known criminal in another country, that country would understand where we were coming from and just return him. Well, I was wrong. It is a version of foreign relations, involving treaties and scrutiny. Tom has to have an extensive knowledge of foreign law, because he has to make sure that his procedures to return prisoners runs according to both the foreign country’s law and America’s laws. I really did not know anything on this subject, nor can I honestly say I have heard anything about it. However, I really did enjoy his talk and felt that I learned a lot.

Thursday, March 4, 2004

Nothing to start off your day like police with very large guns and a tour guide that warns you if you stop along the tour you will be detained. Wahoo! Let the fun begin. Honestly though, it was not an issue at all, and the Pentagon was impressive at times, and at other time seemed kind of run down. The September 11 Memorial was very touching, and I had tears and/or goosebumps the entire time we spent there. I think what really made this part of the tour unforgettable to me was our tour guide. His story, where he lived because his brother had died, is absolutely amazing. It’s just that minor personal touch to the event that brings it back to life in my mind. Although I keep 9/11 in the back of my head, it is hard to forget what really happened that day and how important yet horrible it all was. It’s very easy to forget the pain but remember the images, and personal stories like his bring back that human element that gets lost over time.
I also enjoyed our speakers, even though I do not know much about the military. It is pretty impressive to see how extensive and vast our military is. I guess it has to be huge to fill the biggest federal office building in the world. Also, it is nice to hear a fresh perspective of the military. Mainly I have been hearing anti-war words and catching on to that sentiment. However, yesterday we spent the day with people who pledged undying loyalty to the United States through the military and were very proud of that fact. To them protecting the country is the greatest honor they could have, at least that is what I perceived from them. However, I do not necessarily agree that women should not yet be allowed into certain specialties in the army. Don’t get me wrong, I am not saying that woman should automatically be allowed in, but they should be given a chance. Every woman should have to live up to the same standards as their male counterparts. If not, it’s like Annika Sorenson playing in the PGA because she is good in the LPGA: if you can’t run with the big dogs, don’t even pretend to try. But ladies should at least be given a chance.

Tuesday, March 16 and Thursday, March 18

There isn’t too much to say about today. We all went to Crossfire, which was really cool. I enjoyed how the hosts took time to interact with the audience. I also thought the difference between when the cameras were on and when the cameras were off was really humorous. Paul and Tucker (we are on a first name basis) were friendly and joking with each other before the show, but as soon as the cameras were on they started attacking each other’s views. It also seemed like they were having a lot of fun with the show, and that it was more of a relaxed thing than a pressure-filled half hour. It must be
nice to just go own down to George Washington every day for a half an hour and argue with one of your friends. I thought they both made excellent points, and were gracious to each other. And Tucker looked so good in his bow tie!!! I was disappointed that we couldn’t talk to anyone after the show, but I was more disappointed that we couldn’t bungee jump at Lockheed Martin (wink). It would have been really interesting to hear about what they do outside of their time on the show. But I understand that they are celebrities, and it is a crazy lifestyle.

Thursday started out with a flop and ended up going really well. I did not have very much fun at the Secret Service, and NOT because of going out for St. Patrick’s Day the night before. Based on many of the briefings we have had so far, it just seemed as if the people at Secret Service thought that talking to us was more of a waste of their precious time than anything else. It was one big recruitment session, as if the Army recruiter was speaking to a high school class. They offered nothing personal about themselves, and basically just read through the pamphlets, which I could have done on my own in about the quarter of the time. I thought the whole thing sounded like one big pitch to hire people when almost no one in the group was interested in working there. I also didn’t understand why they would set up a mini museum and gift shop when no one was allowed inside the building. Odd.

Whatever the Secret Service lacked, Sherrod Brown made up for. I really didn’t know what to expect because I had never seen nor heard him before. All I knew was that he made Colin Powell mad, and I didn’t know if I liked him based on that. But I really did enjoy his talk. He and Tim Ryan are probably the two most engaging speakers we have had so far. I admired many of his views, and I also admired how much he cared
about things. He also didn’t ever spurt out his opinion without backing it up with fact. I was very impressed by that, because he was not ignorant, but could back himself up instead of backing himself into a corner. I also noticed his shades of non-partisanship, like when he said he admired Senator DeWine. Comments like that earned him a lot of respect in my book. I must say that I really enjoyed his speech, and I hope that I will be that passionate about issues that concern me in my life, but to also have the brains to do something about it.

Tuesday, March 30, 2004

Today we went to the CIA, which was a really cool experience. When we drove up the scenery was beautiful, but it kind of reminded me of a scary country club. Beautiful scenery, long winding driveways, and then there were the big guys carrying big guns. When we got inside, I began to like it more, and the free stuff they gave us didn’t hurt. We got goody bags AND we got a free picture. How cool is that? Our tour guide was very kind and very bubbly, but she was a little too bubbly for the building it seemed. I enjoyed her tour, but I see her more as a first or second grade teacher than working for the Central Intelligence Agency.

I have not been to the spy museum, so I don’t have anything to compare the CIA museum to, but I thought some of the things they had there was really cool. A lipstick gun could always come in handy, as well as the poison umbrella if people get too close to me a metro. I am really not a big fan of overcrowded areas. Even the fish was pretty sweet and realistic, but I wish she would have told us what it was used for. I sort of hoped that we would have more time to go through the museum, but because we were
running a bit behind schedule I didn’t get a chance to read about more of the gadgets they had. However, it is crazy to think that as advanced as some of those things are, there are even more advanced and hi-tech gadgets that Joe Schmo doesn’t even know about! The things that you can do with technology really amaze me.

I really enjoyed our briefers as well. Charlie and Tony were really candid and open to most of our questions. I never really thought of the CIA as having three different sections, but it is interesting that these guys have access to information that no one else in the world is really allowed to see. They seemed so laid back, but I would think that if I had their job I would be under so much pressure all of the time. What if you didn’t get all the information, and your briefing was incomplete? What if you thought the information that was false was really the true information? That would be a lot to deal with, but I suppose you learn to pick things out as time goes on. It definitely seems like a fantastic job, but it may not be one that I will be qualified for. But I can always keep in mind Tony’s career path, just keep racking up the right kind of experience until you become qualified for the job.

Tuesday, April 6- Thursday, April 8

I enjoyed the Air and Space Museum, although I left with a feeling of wanting more. It is a beautiful building that is now displaying artifacts that have until recently been kept away in storage. However, it just seems like the museum is not done. I am glad that they are planning on putting in about 80 more planes (at least), but I still think more needs to be done. Last semester I went to the Wright Patterson AFB Museum and was incredibly impressed. The hangar was about triple the size of Dulles and they were
still building more. There were planes in every available pocket of space, but there were also a lot more descriptions of the planes. Dulles just seemed too big and too empty in comparison. The planes were beautiful, but it seemed as if historical context was lacking. For example, the many planes were from World War I and II, and it would have been much more interesting to know of a specific story that went along with that particular plane or one similar. Planes are history, yes, but they are nothing without the pilots and their stories. Also, perhaps the most important plane in American history is there, the Enola Gay, and unless you knew to look for it you could walk right past it. Like it or not, the Enola Gay changed world history, and I think that more information should be available around it for visitors. My grandfather is most likely alive today because of that plane, which prevented an invasion of Japan, and I think one blurb about the job it did is not enough. I really enjoyed the tour, even though it was very difficult to hear. But if you got really close to Fred he had a lot of interesting things to say, which helped to spice up the museum because he would give little anecdotes about the planes rather than just talking about the technical aspects.

Later that evening was the last, and the best, of the focus groups. In my opinion, it was the most practical. It was nice to have my resume checked by people who actually read real resumes for real jobs. I can not say that I particularly agreed with everything I was told, and I will probably always put an objective sentence on my resume, but I really enjoyed and appreciated the commentary. My resume has worked pretty well so far, but I will definitely keep in mind to more specific about some of my honors, like being only 1 of 22 accepted into the WPNI program.
Thursday was one of the better briefing days that we have had in my opinion, and perhaps even the best. First of all, the Saudi embassy was huge and beautiful. I thought it would be like a house, but I was pleasantly surprised. Instead it was like a really nice hotel. Also, our speaker was absolutely fantastic. I think he was by far the most open and candid speaker we have had. He did not have any time constraints, and directly answered every question we asked him. I also learned a lot about Saudi Arabia through the film. When I used to think of the country, I would think of how Bin Laden came from there and not even think of it as developed. But our speaker made a good point, saying that we Americans would not want ever want everyone to associate all of us with Timothy McVeigh, and in the same way they do not all want to be associated with Osama bin Laden. And Saudi Arabia really is developed, with interstates and more to their economy than just oil. I am sure that the film is tilted as pro-Saudi, but it also made me aware of a lot more. I was also really impressed with our speaker’s knowledge. A response that definitely surprised me was when he was talking about the war in Iraq and the US reasoning that Saddam Hussein was in violation of 16 U.N. Resolutions. He mentioned that Israel was in violation of 30!! I was absolutely stunned.

April 13, 2004- April 15, 2004

Today we hit up those horrible spreaders of globalization: The IMF and the World Bank. I must say that I did not know much about either before we went, so I was pretty open to what anybody had to say, both good and bad. When we got to the IMF I was really happy with our briefer from Ireland. It was fun to listen to her talk, and I also enjoyed how candid she was and how willing she was to answer questions. In my opinion she brought down the façade of the IMF being some nameless horrible
corporation and instead made it seem real, with real people working for it who want to make a difference. That impressed me because so many times people think that places like the IMF are full of faceless evil people. However, one thing she said did not sit well with me at the IMF. She said that countries put in money to the IMF, but then are regulated to how much they can take out based on how much they put in. To me that didn’t seem quite fair, seeing as to how the U.S. is the largest contributor to the IMF and probably will never need to borrow funds. Whereas smaller Lesser Developed Countries may need the more money but can not take it because they are not rich enough to give more. It seemed like a pointless cycle, a conundrum if you will.

I was not impressed at all with the World Bank. I think that the World Bank and the Secret Service are my least favorite places. When you walked in the front doors it seemed more like an airport than a place where people come to work. I also did not like our speaker at all- I thought she was harsh and overbearing and not a very good public relations employee. Also, the powerpoint that they put on for us also was not anything interesting. Although I didn’t know much about the World Bank, it seems as if I learned a lot more during Sunday night class than during their presentation. I am not saying I would go out and protest it this weekend, but it wasn’t exactly my favorite.

Thursday at the Brookings Institution was a lot of fun, and I am glad that the majority of people seemed to like the place where I work. My boss was also a lot of fun, and I was very pleasantly surprised at how he wanted me to show my work and things like that. I thought it was very thoughtful that he took the time to show the class what we were working on. I was very grateful and was filled with that warm and fuzzy feeling. I also enjoyed Jonathan Rauch’s talk, and I liked the fact that he was very open to all of
our questions, even if he had to defend his viewpoint, which I think he did a stellar job of doing. Brookings has been one of my favorite places this trip, and not just because I work there.

I was also pleasantly surprised with the Heritage Foundation. It is absolutely beautiful when you walk in, and even though our speaker wasn’t the most engaging speaker, I thought he was interesting and we got free cookies. I hope that Brad sends the books on to me because even though I probably will not or do not agree with them, it is interesting to see their point of view. However, I will admit that I did not know that our speaker was joking at first when he said John Kerry will be our next President. Woopsy. I’m not real quick on the uptake sometimes.

Tuesday, April 20, 2004

Today was definitely interesting, and it did not go as I had planned at all. I thought that we would have a rowdy time at the DNC and a subdued time at the RNC. I got that all wrong. Stephanie was a very nice woman, and she was a captivating speaker, but I think she did a fantastic job of avoiding the issues, which is terrible for us. I think a main part of going to the national committees was not only to see how a campaign is run, but also to get a clear view on the party’s and candidate’s positions on the issues. Stephanie did not have much to say in that department, and I thought her speech was pretty dry and boring. However, I guess you can assume that in a room for liberals at the DNC there will not be much dissent. One thing I did not like about what she said was how she was so against individuals spending a lot of money on their campaign and drowning out the “little guy.” (if it was not said directly it was insinuated when she spoke
of running against Chris Shays) I couldn’t help to wonder what she thought of the Democratic candidate then, because he is definitely spending a lot of hi, or his wife’s, money.

The RNC, however, was much different. Rebecca seemed very nice and also very passionate. She did seem to be a bit on the defensive however, sometimes not answering the questions asked and instead coming back with an attack on Kerry. I think that we all should have been expecting this, because the RNC is the headquarters of true Republicans, and therefore they are going to only see their side. It is the same way with the Democrats at the DNC. You will not find anyone who is middle of the road at these establishments. I thought the conversation was really engaging, although some aside comments were made that I thought were both rude and inappropriate. Maybe next year to prevent that just warn the kids beforehand that things will probably get a little wild, but to remain respectful. I liked Rebecca a lot, and I also liked how frank she was. She believes that the American voter can be swayed with nothing more than negative ads. In reality it is true, but it is also really sad. I believe her quote was something along the lines of “If the public was educated then we wouldn’t need advertisements.” I enjoyed the fact that she could take the heat and give it right back, and no matter what she stood up for what she believed in, whether we all agreed with it or not. She also left us with a very true or valid statement, that what this country needs, regardless of beliefs or political affiliations, is people who passionately believe in something and are willing to stand up for it. I think that is infinitely important.
Tuesday, April 25

We really ended the semester with a bang. Going into these last two briefings was really difficult, especially waking up so early. However, once we got there I think that these were definitely in my top five briefings all semester. Despite waking up earlier than I ever have yet this semester, I was incredibly impressed with how interesting these briefings were- I didn’t even fall asleep! AT&T was absolutely amazing. I didn’t know what to expect from them, but even if it did suck I thought it was pretty cool that Bill Oliver flew down from New York to speak to our group, and also partly because the CEO was testifying to Congress. Anyhoo, when I heard we were going to have a tour I was not very please, but I was pleasantly surprised by the technology session. Although Larry went very fast, it was still really cool to see what the future of phone companies are going to be. There were just so many other questions I wanted to ask though- Can you use it with dial up? Are internet charges included? Always have to be online with the Callvantage window open? Ah well, I suppose I will know the answers to those when I own the system in a couple of years.

Bill Oliver was a really cool guy, a businessman through and through, but he also kind of scared me. He had this voice that was all business, but then he’s crack a sarcastic joke. I did not know if it was ok to laugh a little bit, or if he’d come over and slap me across the face. Just kidding. It was incredibly interesting to get a corporate view on policy plans and issues. I felt bad for ATT after hearing their side of the story, even though I would have dismissed their case without even hearing it before this trip. I also liked how he gave a realistic view of policymaking. So many people, myself included, like to say that we are going into policy because we want to make the world a better place.
However, the reality of it is that it is indeed a battleground. Each side goes out and tries to defeat the other, just without the use of weapons. Real policy is about not getting killed, and I thought that was a very interesting viewpoint, one that most of us would never have even fathomed existed.

Julian and Coley were also very good. I found them very friendly, although their subject matter was a little on the dry side. I loved their passion and the fact that they were completely able to put past political differences and both work towards something they believed in. I think that nonpartisan view is awesome, and that there should be more teams like that, not just in the private sector but the public as well.

Steve Riccheti was a phenomenal speaker. He had me at hello. I thought that he was one of the most animated and interesting speakers we had heard thus far. He made some good points, as sad as they were- that people care only when things affect their self-interests, and that come election day people will care more about the price of gas than the war in Iraq. The American public is so uninformed its pathetic. I really enjoyed the fact that all four of them stayed around and answered all of our questions. They didn’t’ just answer our questions, they got into examples and drawn out responses. I thought that was a great thing to do on their part.

Sam Donaldson at ABC News was probably the best speaker I have seen since I have been here. I was a little scared when he first walked in, but then I saw he was eating a Snickers bar for lunch and I knew he was my kind of guy. He was so friendly and outgoing, nothing like the stern and serious guy he played on tv. I thought he told brilliant stories and I envy his experiences. He captured my attention and really seemed enthused that we were there to see him. I think he would have kept talking all afternoon
if he wanted to, and then he was kind enough to take pictures with us. I thought Sam was one of the friendliest and most outgoing guy I have ever met, in Washington or at home. He is absolutely fantastic. My deepest thank you to Sam Donaldson, because I can not think of a better way to end our WPNI program.