

CHS student goes to D.C. for State of Union address

written by Aprille Hanson Spivey |



Catholic High School senior Brennan Anderson has the honor of serving as the school's student body president. Little did he know he'd get to meet another president this year — the president of the United States, thanks to newly elected Catholic Rep. French Hill.

Hill, who has known Anderson and his family for years, invited Anderson to be his guest to the State of the Union address Jan. 20.

"Last Thursday (Jan. 15) my dad texted me and said, 'As soon as you get this text you better call me,'" Anderson said. "I thought, 'Oh dang, I'm in trouble.' He said, 'You're going to Washington D.C. with Congressman Hill to the State of the Union address' ... I'm very lucky and blessed."

Hill and Anderson, 17, flew out Tuesday morning. Anderson got to see Hill's office and while Hill worked, his assistants gave Anderson a tour of the capitol and rotunda.

"I got to see (Speaker of the House) John Boehner's office and look out on the balcony, it has a wonderful view," Anderson said.

The next day, Anderson saw Boehner in person, while eating lunch with a family friend at a diner in D.C.

“We saw secret servicemen everywhere, and I looked up and John Boehner walked by in a baseball cap walked, trying to be incognito,” Anderson said.

Anderson, a member of Our Lady of the Holy Souls Church in Little Rock, said he enjoyed sitting in on some committee meetings and dining with Hill at the Capitol Hill Club.

“It’s a Republican stronghold restaurant, there are elephants everywhere,” Anderson laughed.

For the State of the Union, Anderson sat next to a high-ranking administrator in the U.S. Navy, a four-star admiral.

“It was insane to me seeing all these powerful figures,” he said.

But what stuck out the most is that these politicians were not just sticks-in-the-mud.

“They’re people too. One of the funniest parts was when he (President Obama) said that he wasn’t running next year, it was one of the times all the Republicans clapped,” Anderson said. “Then he said that’s because he won the last two and then all the Democrats stood up and clapped. It was just the real world side of people, not just stiff politicians.”

As far as Obama’s speech, Anderson, who is waiting to hear back from a few of his top choice colleges including the University of Notre Dame, was intrigued by the president’s proposal of offering the first two years of community college to students for free.

“I’m not sure about the actual plan, but the idea I love,” Anderson said.

While attending the speech itself was a rare opportunity, so is running into Obama in the hallway leaving the State of the Union.

“We were on our way to Statuary Hall when secret servicemen came walking through ... and then President Obama came walking down the hall, saw me and shook my hand. That was the cherry on top,” Anderson said.

“At first he asked me if I was a page and Mr. Hill said, ‘No, he’s my guest,’” explaining to Obama that Anderson was the student body president at Catholic High, his alma mater. “He (Obama) said, ‘Wow that’s great,’ and asked me the cliché high school senior questions, ‘What are you going to do next?’ I said I was hoping to go to Notre Dame and he said, ‘You really can’t go wrong there.’ He’s just a real person, really personable and genuine, not all fake or just saying hi to people because he had to.”

Anderson said he was interviewed by a few different media outlets after the State of the Union and enjoyed seeing Hill respond to the speech.

“I met a lot of representatives and senators. It was cool to hear their input on the address,” Anderson said. “Mr. Hill was mature about it, said some good things and bad things about it; I respect that.”

On Wednesday afternoon, Anderson flew back to Little Rock and was back in class on Thursday with unforgettable memories. Though he doesn’t have political aspirations yet — he plans to

study finance and business — he may follow in the footsteps of Hill one day, if he “has that calling,” Anderson said.

“I’m writing my thank-you note to Mr. Hill right now, it’s at least top three,” Anderson said of ranking his life experiences with the State of the Union trip. “It was one of if not the coolest experience of my life ... I’m still in disbelief. I’m very thankful and blessed.”