On May 16, students from BYU-Provo, BYU-Idaho, and BYU-Hawaii participated in the BYUPAS Inaugural National Conference with D.C. professionals in Washington, D.C. to get an inside peak into life as a Latter-day Saint working in D.C. While students were flying to DC from all over the country, volunteers with the BYU Political Affairs Society spent late nights organizing worksite visits, networking receptions, keynote speakers, and panels.

The BYUPAS National Conference began Thursday night with a keynote from Representative Salmon (AZ-05). A student said, “He [Rep Salmon] made a great connection with the BYU students because he brought in the gospel and spiritual side of it. Family relationships are a huge concern for many BYU students that want to work in DC. I would work there too if I knew that my work time would not overshadow what is really important in this life: family.” Following his remarks, students got to mingle with professionals in the D.C. area to learn about different available careers. One student felt that this networking experience justified the entire trip, “The Thursday night networking was amazing. I met with a young woman who does exactly what I am interested in doing, and we had time to talk about all my questions. She was able to tell me about the daily realities of her job, the good and bad parts, including some things I had never considered. It was great to have so much time to talk. I came to the conference unsure if I was on the right track, and left feeling confident I would love the job. I was also able to ask some hiring questions about how to improve my chances of being hired. Some things I thought would matter might not, and some things I had not considered will matter. The entire conference was wonderful, but this one session alone made it a truly amazing and worthwhile event for me.”

After a late night of networking, students awoke early to visit different work sites in the area. The sites included a variety of different employers including National Defense University at Fort McNair, the Department of Justice, Capitol Hill, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Pentagon, Senate Judiciary Committee, and others. Overall the BYUPAS volunteers arranged 40 different visits for students providing them with the opportunity to meet with 4 different professionals in the D.C. area at their place of work. “I really like the visits. It took us to different fields that were very different and also how it was linked to politics, either
Moreover, the people that we interact with love their job, they have a passion for it, and they are willing to take the time to explain it to us, and have a desire to help us in finding more about their careers, but they also had an interest in us and what we want to do after BYU. I thought that it was great to help us have the opportunity to talk with them and ask them questions openly.”

Immediately following a full day in D.C., students headed to the Washington Convention Center for some much needed food. They attended a banquet featuring Judge Thomas Griffith of the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals. Besides finally getting to enjoy a delicious meal, students got to meet with people who work in D.C. and listen to Judge Griffith’s remark. Judge Griffith spoke about the importance of building up the Kingdom of God and generously stayed after the banquet and met with students. “My favorite part of the conference was Judge Griffith speaking to us and the banquet because I was able to meet and talk to people in a setting that didn’t seem awkward or contrived. Listening to him speak was very beneficial because I learned some very important things about life in politics that reconciled politics with my personal beliefs.”

Saturday morning began with different panels. The panel topics ranged from “Running a Winning Campaign” to “International Development: Am I My Brother’s Keeper.” The panelists represented a diverse bunch of people who have worked in D.C. including Aaron Sherinian, Kay King, and Ken Bowler. One student, “liked the variety of speakers, I liked how I could personally identify with the speakers and understand their pathways to professionalism. I really liked the caliber of speakers; I was honored to be able to hear from them so easily.”

Following the panels, students got to hear from John Podesta, former White House Chief of Staff under President Clinton. Podesta’s remarks focused on the Millennium Development Goals and the possibility of eradicating poverty. For one student interested in international development this was her highlight/ Another student “enjoyed the opportunity that [she] had to listen to Podesta speak and also be able to ask questions. Podesta was an exciting speaker to conclude the conference with. I like learning from a direct source.” With the close of Podesta’s remarks, the conference ended and BYU students headed home, exhausted, but optimistic about their futures. “Before, I was overwhelmed with the idea that I had no idea how to get a job in DC, but thanks to talking to recent grads working on Capitol Hill, I now have a pretty good idea of how to reach my career and educational goals.”