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Address to the COS World Affairs Council, April 22, 2013

Thank you all so much for taking the time to honor our team today. As you know, the Colorado Springs School Model United Nations team had an extraordinary opportunity to participate in a conference in Reykjavik this past February. This conference, known as IceMUN, was a three day experience full of tense yet diplomatic debate. Students from Iceland, Canada, Finland, Hungary, Spain, and Ukraine met with our team members to debate and resolve the current outbreak of violence and French intervention in Mali. In all honesty, I can say that the quality and intensity of this Security Council debate was among the best I have experienced in four years of Model U.N. The resolutions were very detailed and went through multiple rounds of debate and amendments to ensure that the interests of various countries were accurately represented. Mr. Benson, our sponsor, even represented the non-voting Malian government to add a new dynamic and an extra sense of realism to the council. Both our students and the others were well-prepared and eager to face the challenge of representing their countries’ positions while coming to an agreement at the same time, making for an excellent conference and difficult competition. In the end, our CSS team brought home the top two awards, a great way to conclude our first-ever international conference.

Although it felt great to earn these awards, the much deeper level of growth and acquired knowledge among all of our team members was far more rewarding. Not only did it encompass the countries we studied and represented, but also went beyond to include the cultures of the diverse participants in the conference. In our time in between each debate session, our students conversed extensively with the other students, displaying a thirst for understanding. I can remember a Ukrainian girl asking my peers countless questions about the United States political system, political parties, and media outlets. A Finish student shared his opinions about the social and political atmospheres in Finland, and Icelandic, Canadian, and CSS students began a discussion about the United States Bill of Rights, of course. One of the highlights of the trip was our visit with President Olafur; the IceMUN coordinators actually set aside time in the middle of the day for this so that the entire group of students and sponsors could go together. The President welcomed us into his home and shook hands with us individually, a sign of his appreciation for our participation in the conference. He then took the time to explain the political and social background of modern Iceland and to offer us words of wisdom for the future. He shared with us his hope that violent countries could one day move towards an Icelandic model of peaceful political and social relations. After all, we had just strolled through the front door of the President’s home without being scanned. One of his most memorable comments was his emphasis on the importance of young people to learn about and discuss current world issues. Without an open-minded yet firm younger generation, future conflicts would be rooted in misunderstanding. I can speak for my fellow team members when I say that we were all very honored and humbled to have been addressed personally by the President of Iceland, and we all took home new wisdom for our future endeavors. Of course, we also enjoyed a bit of Icelandic culture when we tasted local seafood dishes not found in the United States (including dried, crusty fish fillets) and visited Reykjavik restaurants with our new Icelandic friends.

Our team was inundated with information about Iceland and so many other countries, and we developed a comprehension that would not have been acquired had we sat in a classroom and studied instead. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, our team was given the opportunity to learn first-hand about the importance of diplomacy, cordiality, and acceptance of differing customs and viewpoints. We were the first United States team to participate in this conference, and it was up to us to make a lasting good impression while simultaneously accepting and respecting the impression made on us by the other students. I cannot express how much our entire team appreciates the World Affairs Council’s generous donation to make this experience possible, and we certainly plan to use all that we have learned in our everyday lives and for the promotion of international awareness. Thank you.