

Florida 4-H Members Explore Issues Affecting Youth at the 2012 National 4-H Conference

WASHINGTON, March 24-29, 2012 –A delegation of four Florida 4-H youth and one adult chaperone joined 200 4-H members from across the country that came to the nation's capital to make their voice heard as part of the 2012 National 4-H Conference, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). Florida's youth delegation included Christy Connell from Santa Rosa County, Amanda Holmes from Marion County, Victoria Banner of Alachua County, Joel Weaver from Duval County and adult mentor Geralyn Sachs, St. Johns County 4-H Youth Development Extension Agent.

Guest speakers throughout the week included Dr. Jill Biden, Second Lady of the United States, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Aaron Davis, former University of Nebraska football player.

Dr. Biden, a longtime educator, spoke to conference participants about Joining Forces, the initiative she started with First Lady Michelle Obama to encourage all Americans to support military families. Dr. Biden encouraged 4-H members to not only continue their longtime support of military families, but to continue to act as role models and mentors in their communities. "These 4-H members are extraordinary role models and mentors in their communities," Dr. Biden said. "Just as our military men and women serve our country on the battlefield, these young people lead in our communities. Over the next few decades, one of the tasks that will define their generation will be their support for our returning veterans and our military families."

Since the first conference in 1927, the National 4-H Conference, known as the "Secretary's Conference," continues to be USDA's premier forum to engage youth in developing recommendations for the 4-H Youth Development Program. "For almost 100 years, USDA and 4-H have partnered to produce some of our nation's best and brightest, including farmers and ranchers who have supported the American economy and put food on our tables," Vilsack said. "You all are tomorrow's leaders. We need you to think big, innovate and help tackle the important challenges standing between us, a stronger middle class and a stronger nation."

Mr. Aaron Davis, former University of Nebraska football player, challenged youth to develop true friendships that will help them excel in life and achieve their dreams.

In addition to meeting with Florida Congressmen Jeff Miller, 1st District, and Legislative Aid Elizabeth Smokay, to Dan Webster 8th District, participants at this year's conference engaged in personal development experiences that aim to increase their knowledge, resources and skills on issues that matter most to them. As in previous years, delegates

participated in roundtable discussions with partnering federal agencies about topics specific to issues affecting youth and communities nationwide and the role 4-H can play in addressing those issues. Issue topics for this year's conference include: alcohol and drug use prevention, youth suicide prevention, healthy eating and living, equal education for under-represented groups, integration of veteran and military families into local communities, and using science and technology to improve local communities. When asked about the conference, youth delegate Joel Weaver of Duval County said "National 4-H Congress was one of the best experiences of my life. Having the opportunity to represent thousands of 4-H'ers and meet with government officials is a huge blessing for me. Not only was the government aspect of the trip amazing, I also got to meet other well-rounded 4-H'ers from across the country! I couldn't have asked for a better experience."

Also during this year's conference, delegates learned about a new partnership with the Department of Homeland Security focused on cyber security. The Stop.Think.Connect Campaign provided 4-H participants with the tools and resources to help raise awareness among teens and young adults regarding emerging online threats and the importance of cybersecurity. This partnership builds on the campaign's efforts to highlight resources available to schools and communities, as well as to promote cyber awareness and educate America's youth about safe online practices.

To find out more information on the Florida 4-H Youth Development Program go to <http://florida4h.org/>

4-H is a community of young people across America learning leadership, citizenship and life skills. As one of our nation's oldest, yet most current organizations, 4-H is reaching millions of young people with positive youth development opportunities.

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