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Fall 2005 Internship Report: Senate Judiciary Committee (Majority)

My Washington, D.C. experience was quite a journey, which began even before the commencement of my internship with the Senate Judiciary Committee.

In early September, I arrived in Washington to attend the Civic Skills Training sponsored by the Rockefeller Center of Dartmouth College. The staff was very instructive, and did an excellent job in preparing and arming students with real life employment entry skills. Before my internship began, I was taught how to improve my public speaking skills, and to be more productive and proactive within the workplace. Additionally, the five-day conference included workshops on goal setting, resource mobilization, media relations, and perhaps most importantly, networking. I was fully able to appreciate the extent of the Civic Skills pre-internship training, because one of the most important tasks involved meeting and networking with prominent political individuals, and maintaining those contacts on behalf of the Senators on the Judiciary Committee. Because of the training, I was able to put in practice the worthwhile benefits of my recent Civic Skills Training, and build upon old skills to create new strengths.

At the beginning of the fall, I was initially hired as a part-time congressional intern at the Office of Congresswoman Gwen Moore (D-WI), my own Representative. This too was a wonderful opportunity in which I learned a great deal relative to variances between District and Federal House offices, legislative policy and research, and gained some basic knowledge of the inner workings of Capitol Hill. My experience with Congresswoman Moore's office proved most beneficial, as the staff was very instructive and helpful, but the position lacked full-time status as required by the Rockefeller Center Program. As a result, they were aware of my circumstance, and encouraged my pursuit of full-time intern status.

Upon learning of an internship opportunity with the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee (Majority), I believed my experience to date would serve as an asset. It seemed like an amazing opportunity and a natural fit. I submitted my resume, underwent the interview process, and was fortunate enough to land an internship. I was extremely pleased and excited, as this too was such a timely and relevant period in history. My internship commenced Monday, October 24, 2005 and right away, I began compiling information for the pending confirmation hearings of the Supreme Court Judicial Nominee Harriet Miers. I worked with three fellow interns, two were University graduates and one was a junior at Stanford. I was simply amazed at the amount of responsibility we were delegated, and felt that I was making a significant contribution right off the bat. I even remember a senior staff member voicing, "Capitol Hill is really a place that is populated by many young workers who make a significant contribution to the policy and surrounding politics." That was very encouraging and propelled my interest in politics even further.

On the Committee, my duties included archiving important files, letters, and official legal paperwork that was relevant to Harriet Miers nomination, measuring constituent opinion regarding Ms. Miers, and evaluating her previous judicial record and stance on hot-button issues that would undoubtedly surface during her hearings. I also sorted mail for the members of the Committee, and researched topics of relevance that might be of interest to them during the hearings. My favorite responsibility, however, was drafting letters to constituents regarding questions and concerns they had regarding the Supreme Court Nomination process and the nominee, which was Ms. Miers at the time.

I enjoyed working for the Committee immensely. Unfortunately, after Harriet Miers' rescinded her nomination and Nominee Samuel Alito was offered as a replacement, I only continued to work for the Committee for another few weeks. I then was transferred to the main office of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT), who is a ranking member of the Committee.

Initially, I was fearful of the change. I had already adjusted to this new workplace, and enjoyed the ambiance and nature of the work. I was looking forward to being in engaged in an action-packed, charged environment where I never knew who I would see in a judicial hearing, or what change of events might occur with the nomination proceedings. However, I also enjoyed this part of the job, and learned a great deal more about the Senate from a different perspective.

Some of my initial office duties included answering phones, drafting and mailing constituent letters, and running errands, but eventually I was able to attend hearings and conferences to listen in on issues that were relevant to the Vermont constituency. I also wrote reports and made presentations to members of Senator Leahy's staff. However, my favorite part of the job was being able to go to the Senate Floor, and sit in a special staff-only section, where I could watch all of the proceedings and voting, as one might on C-Span. It was an amazing experience to watch Senators make speeches, vote and have small side conversations amongst themselves, while each was less than a few feet away. At first, it was very surprising, and I couldn't help but feel a bit star-struck amidst all of these powerful political players. However, after I was able to conquer my fears and look past the celebrity, I was able to meet and have meaningful and engaging conversations with Senator Leahy, Senator Hillary Clinton (D-NY), Senator Barack Obama (D-IL) and even Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA).

But most importantly, I became more literate in my understanding of the Senate, and how this governmental body works within Washington to solve problems and change policy in a responsive, proactive and progressive way.

My time in Washington proved to be a most insightful and rewarding learning experience. It motivated me to not only test my independence and determination, but underscored the realities of perseverance and humility, and taught me to have an even greater appreciation of my good fortune to be an active participant within my own government. The experience further propelled my interest in politics and the sphere of policy, and has initiated my desire to pursue a post-graduate degree in public policy or

law. Additionally, I strongly believe that when you reach back, you move forward. I would like to maintain contact with the Rockefeller Center, and serve as a student advisor and mentor to other student interns, specifically those who are Class of 1964 Fellows. Overall, I am extremely grateful to the Class of 1964, and appreciate their generosity. The support of the Class helped foster this meaningful experience, and permitted me to acquire skills that will surely serve me well at Dartmouth and in the future.