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Rockefeller Center Internship Grant Final Report
Summer 2005

I spent June 19 through July 26, 2005 interning for Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D – FL) in Washington D.C. Over this time period I kept an extensive journal of my thoughts and experiences, inside and outside of my daily internship. When looking back, it is clear that this internship experience was life-altering. The learning, experiences, and networking done during the day at my internship and those same things taking place after my internship were unbelievable.

A significant portion of my funding went towards my housing, a George Washington University dormitory named Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis Hall (she was a GW alumni). GW offers their dorms to college students who are interning for the summer. Living at GW was important because I befriended many other interns from around the country, and I was able to live in the heart of Washington D.C. All of the other interns in my office also were living on the GW campus.

Everyday, I took the Metro five stops down the red line to the Capitol South station. From there I simply had to cross the street and enter the House Cannon Office Building, the oldest of the three House-side offices. And after unloading my pockets and crossing through a metal detector, I was only a few doors away from office 118 – Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz’s office. Being a freshman congresswoman, the office was unimpressive in its size but unrivaled in its energy. I worked in the same room as the four legislative assistants and the other interns. While the large mass of people working in such small quarters was often chaotic and jarring, it facilitated close relationships. I developed good friendships with my fellow interns, and serious connections with the full-time staffers.

My job was multi-faceted. It was the basic responsibilities of the interns to answer phone calls, sort and send mail, and give tours of the Capitol building to visiting constituents. However, my internship duties soon went beyond these basic roles. I was assigned projects by staff members, attended committee hearings and briefings, and was asked to write rough drafts of response letters that would be sent to constituents.

Answering phones and sorting/sending mail are not the most thrilling activities in the world, but regardless, they are activities that take place in all offices across the world. I would say, luckily, less than ten percent of my internship time was spent doing these activities. These menial jobs, however, allowed me to appreciate doing more thought provoking ones.

Giving tours of the Capitol Building was an awesome experience. It allowed me to interact with constituents, develop my public speaking skills, and become intimate with one of this country's most historic and important landmarks. My first day in the office I followed another intern on his tour of the Capitol and I was given an information packet to study. By Friday of that week, I was asked to lead a tour by myself. At first I was nervous and I made a few wrong turns, but in the end it turned out great. The group of middle school students and their chaperones loved it. I especially liked giving the tours to families who had little children. I was constantly amazed by the idea that the Capitol Building may not be the most entertaining place for youngsters, yet almost every child who went on the tour seemed to grasp the important function of the building. Furthermore, it was exciting to see the awe in the faces of children and adults when we would reach the massive rotunda room. Additionally, each tour would be concluded with a trip to the House or Senate chamber galleries, on most days Congress would be in session and I would be able to watch, live, the floor speeches and votes. No matter how many tours I led, I always looked forward to the ten minutes spent observing from the gallery.

At the end of the very first week, I was assigned a longer-term project from the senior legislative aide. She was putting together a comprehensive financial education program for lower-class constituents back in Florida. She assigned me the role of sifting through all of the material and educational programs that large institutions (i.e. banks, credit card companies, debt specialists, etc.) sent to the office, and analyzing the pros and cons of each group's education method.

While this was interesting and meaningful, my favorite project that was the writing of response letters to the constituents. Each day, our office would receive thousands of form letters sent by constituents who had taken the actual writing from some interest group. Thus, when groups of form letters came in, response form letters would

go out. I was often asked to research and write the first drafts of a response. In my two months in the office, I wrote around twenty different response letters. Of course, when I was done writing, they would be edited and edited and edited, until the chief of staff approved them. Legislation and topics I wrote about included: gun bans, immigration, health insurance, health care, environmental issues, animal rights, and tort reform. I learned how to research and track current legislation, and learned how political offices craft their strategy.

Another exciting part of my internship was to attend briefings and hearings. A staff member would ask me to attend and afterwards I would have to write a memo describing the briefing. Some of the interesting briefings I attended involved cancer research funding, CAFTA, biofuels, and proselytizing in the Air Force Academy.

Another exciting part of interning on the hill was seeing famous people. For example, one morning, I was eating breakfast alone in one of the congressional cafeterias and as I look up from my bowl of Frosted Flakes, I see Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert eating breakfast with two of his staffers at the table next to me. Another day, I was visiting a friend on the Senate side late in the day, and as I was getting off of the little subway car (Capitol Hill has a mini subway system, connecting the buildings) I saw Senator Barak Obama. Thirty minutes later as I was heading back from the Senate side, I press the button for an elevator and out walks John Kerry. As I am staring in amazement, I miss the elevator and as I press the button again, down comes a new elevator and out walks John McCain, who is not much taller than me. It is intriguing to me how these celebrities, these powerhouse politicians, are just real people. On July 20, I got to witness something truly memorable. The congresswoman for who I interned sits on the House Financial Services committee. It is before this committee that Alan Greenspan testifies twice a year in his position as Chairman of the Fed. So on July 20, I was lucky enough to be seated three rows behind Alan Greenspan as he made his testimony, possibly the last time he will do so in his career. The next day, I watched Donald Trump testify in front of a Senate subcommittee. In two days, I saw two of the most influential financial gurus in the world, in person.

The experience outside of my formal internship was also very meaningful. I developed close friendships with the other interns in my office, and I spent time with

friends from Dartmouth. I was able to explore the vibrant city of Washington D.C. I attended exhibitions at the National Gallery of Art, I read the names of those remembered on the Vietnam Memorial, and I celebrated the Fourth of July under the shadow of the Washington Monument. The diversity of D.C. and the surrounding communities is truly amazing. While I love spending the bulk of my year in the rural settings of Northern New England, spending my summer in one of this country's most important urban centers was a life-altering opportunity.

With that, I would like to thank the Rockefeller Center for making this possible. My eyes have been opened, and I am grateful.