

Caroline Kerr
Summer Internship Write-Up
15 August 2016

For six weeks this summer I had the incredible opportunity to intern in Senator Bill Cassidy's Washington, D.C. office. For the first two weeks of my internship the Senate was in session so we were encouraged to sit in on as many meetings with the Senator as possible, attend hearings and briefings, and sit in the Senate gallery as frequently as possible. Inside the office our daily tasks included sorting and assigning constituent mail, answering phone calls and speaking to constituents, giving tours of the Capitol building, as well as completing assignments for the staffers and aiding them in their research. There were also several opportunities each week to listen to speakers brought in for the interns from offices in the Senate and in the House.

I feel fortunate to have worked in Senator Cassidy's office because I could tell that he genuinely wanted the interns to learn and enjoy our experience. He knew all of our names, and knew us personally, which is something that does not happen in many internships in the Senate. In our first week we met with the Senator and he assigned us each a project to research based on our personal interests. I researched the effect of "Brexit" on the rest of Europe, but I focused mostly on France because I am a French and International and Global Studies. We met and emailed with the Senator several times throughout our internship to update him on our progress and get feedback. Not only was the Senator encouraging of our work, but all of the staffers made an effort to get to know the interns and give us work that is interesting and will actually be used to write legislation or respond to events. We

were never given any work that was “busy work” just meant to keep us occupied, it was all actually something that would be used in the future.

My favorite experience from my internship was during the second week. We had a group of four elected officials from France request a Capitol tour through our office. Three of the men were mayors of towns in Normandy, and the fourth was a member of the National Assembly. They were in the United States through a program organized by the State Department. Since I speak French I was able to sit in on their meeting with the Senator and then be their tour guide around the Capitol. I had fun practicing my French, and talking to them about their roles in the French government.

This internship was truly meant to be an educational experience, and I feel that I learned more than I ever could have in a classroom. I got to see how this part of the government actually works from the inside. From the outside people only see the stagnation, and it seems to them like nothing is happening. To some extent this is true. It is frustrating to see how difficult it is to address an urgent problem, like funding Zika research, and how it can take months to reach an agreement from both parties. I also was shocked on a daily basis at the very limited knowledge most people have of the structure, and function of the legislative branch of our government. I spoke to people daily who clearly did not understand how the government worked and it was distressing to me. People can graduate from high school in this country and never learn that Senators cannot vote on legislations going through the House of Representatives because they are two separate bodies, or that a Senator from Louisiana cannot do anything about signs posted in Phoenix,

Arizona. Speaking to constituents, and reading letters and emails from them was incredibly interesting and informative for me.

I am so grateful to have been able to spend this summer interning in D.C. It was a great learning experience and more fun than I could have hoped for. I learned that I do love the environment in D.C., and would love the opportunity to return, but I think I want to do something off the Hill with a lobbying firm, think tank, or something that works with the government, but is not officially a part of it. I am incredibly grateful that I was able to spend six weeks working at an unpaid internship and that is in large part due to the funding I received from Sewanee.