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**U.S. Representative Sam Johnson's Washington, D.C. Office**  
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I spent this summer in my hometown of Washington, D.C. interning for Congressman Sam Johnson of Texas. Congressman Johnson has been in Congress since 1991, making him one of the longest serving in the House. He is also known for his stay at the Hanoi Hilton as a prisoner of war in the Vietnam War. While serving as a fighter pilot in the Air Force, his plane was shot down over Hanoi in 1966. He was a prisoner of war for almost 7 years, with 42 of those months being spent in solitary confinement. Now, Congressman Johnson serves the United States as Chairman of the Social Security Subcommittee under the House Ways and Means Committee.

Much of my time in Congressman Johnson's office was spent manning the front desk. This included the task of talking to all of the constituents who call the office and taking down their comments. I also coordinated tours of the Capitol and the White House for constituents, and would often take constituents on tours of the Capitol myself. The internship also came with its fair share of running errands, whether that be to FedEx or to the Cloakroom to drop off a co-sponsor form. I also took advantage of the opportunity to attend the countless number of briefings held on the Hill.

This summer on Capitol Hill was marked by one major bill that I'm sure Congressional interns are much too familiar with — the Trade Promotion Authority. TPA, as it is known, is legislation that essentially amends the style in which trade deals are negotiated and passed through Congress. TPA is not new in any way, as it has been in place since the 1970's and used to negotiate all trade agreements the U.S. has been involved in. The President has been in the

process of negotiating a trade agreement called the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). This is a free trade agreement with over 10 Southeast Asian and South American countries that would expand our international business and gain an edge against China. The problem with the two pieces is that TPP cannot be negotiated in full without Congress bringing back TPA (it expired a few years ago). With the TPA, the trade agreement would be met in Congress with an up or down vote — no amendments can be made. Rather, Congress would influence in the negotiations by setting the agenda and reviewing the agreement at any time during the negotiation process. If our Congress had the ability to amend the trade agreement after it left the negotiating table, our potential trading partners would drop their support of TPP. President Obama, in order to bolster his legacy with the passage of the Trans Pacific Partnership, needed Congress to pass TPA this summer.

The mere fact that President Obama was pushing for TPA so ardently would turn off many conservative Republicans, but interestingly enough, many Democrats were opposed to TPA as well. These Democrats saw TPA as a way to “fast track” the approval of the impending trade agreement, which they did not support while the Republican leadership in Congress, along with President Obama, pushed for votes on both sides. Our office (Republican) supported TPA, to the dismay of many angry and confused constituents.

We received calls constantly for over a week regarding this vote. It quickly became obvious that people were confused and misinformed about TPA — callers thought that we were voting on the actual trade agreement, the TPP. They also believed that the TPA was secret. The TPP is secret, because it is a trade agreement in negotiation — confidentiality is imperative. The TPA, being a regular bill, was completely public with its text published online. This confusion

sparked a lot of anger, and I had to explain to an abundance of callers what the reality actually was. I learned so much during those TPA-ridden weeks — I learned more about free trade than I ever would have imagined while I explained this confusing topic to “passionate” callers.

Answering phones became one of the most common tasks of my internship, and despite being told to “go to Hell” several times (among other things), it was something that I grew somewhat fond of. It was easy to see that the people who called our office, angry or not, were concerned about the country and wanted to help by voicing their opinion. Obviously, there were some people who called malevolently and without regard to the stranger on the other end of the phone (me), but those calls were seldom.

I was also tasked with organizing tours for constituents. This methodical process quickly improved my Microsoft Excel skills, as well as my email etiquette. As a D.C. native, I have been to almost all of the museums in the city, including the White House, and I know personally that the White House tour is a dud. Most people do not know this. When I have to break it to the hopeful constituents that they did not get a White House tour, things can get ugly. There are some that lament that their toddlers will not be able to meet the President, and a few others who get a little too upset — like one woman I spoke to who blamed me personally for ruining her birthday with the unfortunate news. Congressional offices keep their interns busy by offering staff-led tours of the Capitol to visiting constituents. Giving tours was something I very much enjoyed. My public speaking skills improved exponentially, as these groups looked to me as the expert on everything from the Old Supreme Court Chamber to the bell system.

I was familiar with Capitol Hill before I interned this summer, but I learned a lot more about how the Hill works. There were a lot of things that surprised (and even shocked) me, and

some of my political views, after seeing things from the inside, definitely changed. I'm definitely interested in politics, but after a summer on the Hill I know that it's not the environment for me.

On a more personal level, I developed genuine friendships with many of the staffers in the office. The office promptly showed me that working hard and having fun are not mutually exclusive. I was fortunate in that regard, as some interns arrive in D.C. and find out that they cannot wear pants to work because they are female or that they cannot wear their hair up as it looks "unprofessional" to some members of Congress. There is even an office that does not hire women.

I would like to pursue my interest in politics by considering a career in journalism. One of the things I'll miss the most — besides my wonderful coworkers — is the myriad of free news publications delivered to our office daily. I loved reading the different perspectives on things happening on the Hill, whether that be something we were voting on or a recent scandal about a member whose office was down the hall.