

Timothy Walter
Tonya Public Affairs Internship
August 1st, 2016

This summer I served as a Congressional intern for the Honorable Congressman Dr. Scott DesJarlais. Congressman DesJarlais represents the 4th Congressional District of Tennessee, which is located in the central and southcentral portion of the state and includes all of Bedford, Bledsoe, Franklin, Grundy, Lincoln, Marion, Marshall, Meigs, Moore, Rhea, Rutherford, Sequatchie, and Warren counties and sections of Bradley, Maury, and Van Buren counties. Congressman DesJarlais is currently serving his 3rd term in the House of Representatives and serves on three house committees: Agriculture, Oversight and Government Reform, and Foreign Affairs. Recently, Congressman DesJarlais has been up for re-election with his main opponent being Grant Starrett, a lawyer from Murfreesboro, Tennessee. In addition, Congressman DesJarlais also serves on the House Freedom Caucus. The freedom caucus is comprised of Republican members of Congress, and as a member of the caucus, one of Congressman DesJarlais' responsibilities was to advocate for Donald Trump as president amongst Republican members of Congress who were not yet able to endorse him for President. My internship on Capitol Hill was a valuable time and has made me interested in returning after graduation.

One of my primary responsibilities this summer was communicating with constituents over the phone and through mail. Many of my constituent calls were regarding the Confederate flag, LGBT rights, TPP, as well as the upcoming Presidential Election, and it was my responsibility to listen to their concerns or comments, as well as explain why the Congressman voted a certain way on a piece of legislation. This made my internship constantly engaging, as communicating with the constituents required me to follow politics and the legislative process very closely. I would relay these comments and concerns to the appropriate staff member who would then converse with the Congressman regarding these issues. Congressman DesJarlais frequently visits the back office to talk with his

Legislative Director, Communications Director, and Legislative Aids, so I was able to listen in and understand how they made policy decisions as a team. In addition, I was trained to give tours of the U.S Capitol to constituents as well as lobbyists. I was expected to know the history, artwork, architecture, etc. about the U.S Capitol and make sure the constituents had a great visit. This was an important responsibility because the staff members reflect on the Congressman. Between the Capitol tours and dealing with the constituents, I found that I was a much better public speaker than I have previously given myself credit for at Sewanee. I hope that this skill manifests itself in my classes this fall.

My intern project this year was to attend and take notes on the Oversight and Government Reform Committee (OGR). Two of the most interesting OGR hearings I attended were regarding Guantanamo Bay and Hillary Clinton's emails where Federal Bureau of Investigation Director James Comey testified in front of the committee. In the Guantanamo Bay Hearing, Committee Chairman Jason Chaffetz (UT-03) addressed the committee and those testifying by asking whether closing the facility would be in our best national interest and do the detainees present a threat to the United States' national security. Those testifying came to the conclusion that closing the facility would not be in the nation's best interest, yet the amount of money that the federal government is spending on the facility needs to be limited. The OGR hearing which FBI Director Comey testified for was the highlight of my summer internship. Comey stated that Hillary Clinton made a mistake by sending and receiving classified information on an unauthorized server, yet she could not be convicted of a felony because there was no evidence regarding her intent. These hearings were the most interesting aspect of my job this summer because I got to learn about major policy areas and news from members of both the Democratic and Republican committees and see how they interacted with one another.

In addition to following the Oversight and Government Reform Committee, my office heavily encouraged me to attend briefings on policy matters of my choosing which ranged from the Syrian

refugee crisis, economic reform, and the environment as well as to conduct research on the policy issues of my choice. The policy areas I found myself most interested in were economic reform and conservation issues. I have taken some classes on the Environment and Sustainability at Sewanee, so I was very interested in the topic to begin with. As I continued, I found that many of our constituents had questions, comments, or concerns regarding the Agriculture committee or environmental issues back at home. I was able to type my notes and research regarding these issues and send them to the member of staff who handled such issues, and would then discuss these matters with the Congressman prior to Agriculture committee hearings. I was also given the opportunity to sit-in on meetings between our staff members and lobbyists regarding the environment or other policy areas I found interesting.

This summer internship was an extremely beneficial experience for me. Last summer, I interned for the Metropolitan Golf Association in New York, which I enjoyed, but I wanted to try something a bit more fast-paced with more real world application. My internship on the Hill was exactly that, there was never a dull moment between constituent communication, capitol tours, attending hearings and conduction policy research. The Hill also allowed me to network with other young professionals of a variety of backgrounds who all have worked in public service. I could certainly see myself returning to Capitol Hill for a job after graduation. I would like to thank Sewanee and the Tonya fund for giving me the opportunity to work in the Nation's Capital this summer. It was an honor being able to intern for the Congressman and office who represents Sewanee's Congressional district.