

Grace Priest
Tonya Public Affairs
Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress
August 8, 2014

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This summer, the Tonya Public Affairs Internship Fund gave me the opportunity to work at the Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress (CSPC, or “the Center”) in Washington, D.C. CSPC is a non-partisan, non-profit, public policy think tank and educational organization that applies the strategic thinking and leadership lessons of history to critical, current national issues. While interning at the Center, I was responsible for researching and compiling policy briefs in support of Center initiatives, such as earmarks and the appropriations process, cyber and electric grid security, and U.S.- Latin America relations.

One of the initial aspects that appealed to me most about CSPC is its bipartisan approach to current, national issues. In a city where polarization and extremes are often emphasized, the contributions of non-partisan organizations are extremely important in educating the public and serving as a “mediator” between contrasting opinions. Another wonderful thing about the Center is its relatively small size-- the entire office works together to tackle projects rather than strictly separating assignments by work division, and I felt comfortable with approaching any of the staff members with any questions I might have. This served to be very important; this was my first summer in DC, so it really helped to have a supportive group of staff and other interns who made me feel welcome and offered suggestions and tips for becoming better acquainted with the city.

As an intern, I was given a wide range of responsibilities that ranged from completing daily tasks to working on longer-term projects over the span of the summer. I spent a large part of the time contributing work toward the Center’s cyber-security project. Specifically, I

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contributed research and writing toward “Securing the U.S. Electrical Grid,” a report conducted by the Center and co-chaired by the Honorable Mack McLarty and Governor Tom Ridge. During this, I obtained an extensive amount of knowledge regarding rising national security issues within the nation’s aging electric grid and the technological shift in everyday power grid communications. Another project I worked on was related to researching information that could contribute toward CSPC’s Latin America project. This developing and ongoing project focuses on measures the United States can take in dealing with specific issues regarding relations with Latin America. While countries such as Mexico and Colombia are developing increasingly positive relations with the U.S., other nations such as Venezuela and Argentina are unhappy with the U.S. and have a negative view on U.S. foreign policy. During other parts of the internship, I assisted in organizational tasks, copy editing, and contributing pages toward the Center’s annual presidential *Fellows Review*, a compilation of research papers written by university students who are part of the CSPC Fellows Program.

Additionally, the internship with the Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress gave me the opportunity to network, explore D.C., and attend political events to enhance my knowledge of the projects the Center was researching. Another facet of the internship with CSPC was the opportunity and responsibility of attending various talks and panels headed by other D.C.

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think-tanks and organizations. The other interns and I would often keep an eye out for events hosted by *Politico*, CSIS, Bipartisan Policy Center, as well as various politicians and advocates. For example, I attended a discussion organized by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which discussed the possibilities of spurring local economic growth by welcoming immigrants. Regardless of one's views on immigration policy, the talk presented several potential candidates that CSPC could contact to serve as an addition to the Latin America project.

I am very grateful to the Tonya Public Affairs Internship Fund for providing me with such a wonderful, career-opening opportunity at the Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress. Overall, it was the most amazing experience, both in and out of the office. As a D.C. first-timer, this summer served as an important base and stepping stone towards confirming my hopes to move to the D.C. area post-graduation, as well as in opening up my mind to amazing networking opportunities and room for growth with the advice and guidance of Sewanee alumni. In addition to becoming acquainted with the opportunities in D.C., I developed an increased knowledge of the legislative process and the important roles research institutions, such as CSPC, can play in the grand scheme of things while educating politicians and the public alike.