

This summer I had the privilege of interning in the office of Congressman Emanuel Cleaver in Washington, DC. Mr. Cleaver began his political career as a city councilman in Kansas City, Missouri, and was eventually elected mayor of the city in 1991. After serving as mayor for 8 years, he was elected to the United States House of Representatives in 2005. His congressional district, the Missouri 5th, includes all of Kansas City and outlying rural counties. He has served as the chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus and is a member of the House Financial Services Committee. I began my internship at the end of the May and completed it on August 27th.

As an intern, the staff charged me with both administrative duties as well as direct assistance with policy and casework. One of my main tasks was constituent relations. Every day citizens from the 5th district call, write, fax, or email our office to share their concerns on the nation's most important issues. The other interns and I record and catalog each message we receive. Once the messages are put in the database, we assist the Congressman and his staff on the appropriate responses for each constituent. I also assisted at the front desk, greeting visitors to the office, sorting through the daily mail, and screening potential meetings for members of staff.

All interns were responsible for conducting tours of the Capitol building for constituents who come to visit Washington, DC. After training as a certified Capitol tour guide, we made sure all our constituents had a positive and educational experience when visiting Washington. Apart from administrative duties, I helped staff with policy initiatives and research. Each member of staff handles different areas of policy. I helped look up voting records, statistical information on jobs, the environment, agriculture

subsidies, or any major issue of the day. This research helped the staff make recommendations to the congressman on how he should vote on a certain bill, or if he should take a public position on an important topic to the district and nation.

The staff made sure I was a fully contributing member of the team, and that I learned and experienced as much as possible on The Hill. In the second week of my internship, one of the staffers assigned me and another intern the task of writing a 60 second speech on civility in Congressional debate. Most of what I learned during my internship was through experience, making mistakes, or simply learning on the fly. I discovered that speed is just as important as accuracy. One of the major projects during my time here the Congressman gave to the interns himself. He charged us with finding a way to increase exposure of two Kansas City entities, a local radio station, and the American Jazz Museum. Working as a team, and after many drafts and brainstorming sessions with the Congressman and his staff, we pitched the idea of a live jazz radio show to the board members for the American Jazz Museum, as well as the president of KKFI radio. Every intern had a role to play, and we worked to get the job done. The proposal is currently in the development stage after a positive reception from both the museum and the radio station.

The student loan debate this summer was one that affects millions of people across the country, including students at Sewanee. A few days before the vote on the student loan bill was set to take place, the member of staff responsible for education tasked me with writing a position memo concluding with a vote recommendation for the Congressman. After extensive research and weighing both sides of the argument, I gave the staffer my recommendation. However, I did not know that he had given the

task to a second intern as well, and that he had written a memo recommending the oppose vote. The staffer took our opinions seriously, and relied on our information when he finally made his recommendation to the Congressman. This position memo truly made me feel like I made a difference in the office and with the congressman in that my opinion and research could have convinced him to vote my recommendation.

There were times when conflict would emerge. Speaking with constituents who felt they could be better represented taught me more about fast problem solving and effective communication skills. Being able to help the constituents that needed it made constituent relations work worthwhile. Working for a Member of Congress is no easy task; he or she needs to be an expert on a wide range of issues and effectively communicate those issues to the public. Research and support from the interns and staff is essential to making sure the Congressman is well informed and make decisions appropriately.

When I discussed future career opportunities with people in the political or government field, almost all of them had a story to tell about their days as a Congressional intern. This is the starting point of any career in Washington. I spoke with lobbyists, government staffers, and campaign operatives. Most of them have been in the same position I am in today. I hope to apply the lessons I have learned during my time in Congressman Cleaver's office on my next opportunity here in Washington. This internship taught me what is important in a government or political career, and that working together toward a common goal is more important than any individual achievement.