

Cilla Kasper
Summer 2013
U.S. Senator Tim Kaine
Washington, D.C

This summer I had the wonderful opportunity to intern for the junior United States Senator from Virginia in Washington, D.C. Senator Kaine was elected to the Senate in November 2012 and took office in January 2013. He serves on three different committees: Committee in Armed Services, Committee on the Budget, and Committee on Foreign Relations. I worked out of the D.C. office in the Russell Senate Building. Senator Kaine has offices all over the state of Virginia that handle constituent casework. For example, if a constituent has a Veterans Affairs (VA) problem, they would contact they Virginia Beach office to speak to the staff member in charge of Veterans casework, and same for a constituent that has problem with their mortgage or healthcare. The D.C. office handles legislative matters and meets with constituent groups that would like to present an issue to the Senator.

The office was organized by legislative matter; such as healthcare or military affairs. It was lead by chief of staff, Mike Henry. My boss, Kathy Wilmoth, is the Administrative Director. There is also the scheduler, who keeps track of the Senators' schedule and responds to the numerous invitations that he receives on a daily basis. The Legislative Assistants (LA) are staff members that are specialized in a subject matter, such as housing, foreign affairs, health care, or the military. They meet with organizations about bills, read legislation, and make sure the Senator is well-informed on the subject matter. Beneath them are Legislative Correspondents (LC), who are organized by subject matter as well, and they assist the LAs as needed. The press department puts

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out all the press releases, handles the Facebook page and the Twitter page, and organizes radio and TV interviews.

As an intern, I had many different responsibilities. At any given time there were about seven to eight interns total in the office, all from Virginia or attending school in Virginia. We all worked together in the mailroom. On a day-to-day basis, I would help sort the faxes by subject matter from constituents, enter petitions from constituents into the database, or sort the mail as it would come in to the office. The petitions and faxes would vary by subject depending on what legislation was on the floor at the time. During the immigration bill, we received an influx of faxes, petitions, calls, and letters. Another small responsibility I had was to run a letter to another office or an errand to Printing & Graphics for a staff member. I enjoyed these errands because it allowed me to see other offices and different parts of the Senate and House. One day a week I would work the phones for a few hours. This part of the job was intimidating at first, but I learned to enjoy it. Most people call just to rant about an issue and don't actually have a question. I enjoyed the phones also because it helped me learn more about the issues that were up for a vote.

My boss required each intern to be trained on giving Capitol tours. I had the opportunity to give two Capitol tours over the summer. It was fun and reminded me of visiting the Capitol when I was younger on school field trips. I also was able to help the LCs and LAs by writing letters to constituents, writing briefings for Senator Kaine, and

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researching certain bills and writing reports on them. I had the opportunity to write several briefings for the military staff member for meetings with Senator Kaine and high-ranking Army and Military officials. Another one of my responsibilities was to sit in on meetings with staff members and take notes. Outside of my responsibilities but a daily opportunity that I had was to attend Senate or House hearings of my choice. My boss allowed us to attend any hearing that we found interesting. I was able to attend a healthcare hearing about pay-for-delay medications, a natural disaster preparedness hearing, a hearing on the sale of Smithfield Company, and a hearing on the closing of Guantanamo Bay for example. I enjoyed all of these responsibilities and opportunities that were given to me this summer. The most exciting part of my internship was being able to watch Senator Kaine's speech in Spanish on immigration on the Senate floor. Despite not being able to understand all of it, it was really exciting.

I developed many skills from my summer in D.C. My time on the phone helped me grow my phone skills and person skills because I had to handle constituents that disagreed with the views of Senator Kaine on many legislative matters. I also developed my person skills by being able to attend meetings with staff members and organizations that hope to gain the support of Senator Kaine on specific legislation. The value of communication was very important this summer. All of the interns had one email that the staff members would contact if they needed an errand run or a letter written. It was very important that all of the interns communicated with each other about which projects each one was taking on so as one did not get overlooked and also communicated with the staff about the projects.

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I also grew on my writing skills through the many writing opportunities that I was given. The staff members have a form letter for popular subject matter that constituents write about, such as credit unions, immigration, or gun rights; but when a constituent writes about an obscure topic a return letter must be drafted. I had the opportunity to reply to some of these letters, such as specific health care bills, military legislation, and one letter about changing the name of the Washington Redskins. These letters consisted of researching the topic and drafting a response letter for the staff member to review. The staffer then gave feedback, which helped me develop my writing and research skills.

I took on various projects throughout the summer. One was a memo of the Library of Congress Surplus Books Program. This program utilizes books, which the Library of Congress does not need for its own use and has them available for donation to eligible organizations and institutions. This institution can be an agency of federal government. A U.S. Senate office can take advantage of this program by selecting materials from the Library of Congress and distributing them to eligible institutions throughout the state, such as public schools or libraries. I had the opportunity to draft a memo on the program for Senator Kaine and his assistant.

Some ongoing projects that I had over the summer were writing briefings for Senator Kaine. Senator Kaine often had meetings with high-ranking Department of Defense officials. I was able to write the briefings for these meetings. These briefings were in order to inform Senator Kaine whom he was meeting with, the purpose of the meeting, biographies on the attendees along with photographs, any recent news articles that relate to the attendees or purpose of the meeting, and talking points for the meeting,

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as well as details about time, place, and staff attending. Some high-ranking officials that I was able to write briefings for were the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin E. Dempsey, Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, General Raymond T. Odierno, and Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Mark A. Welsh III.

I learned a lot from this summer in the Senate. There were a few low points but I thoroughly enjoyed all of it. The low points were the tedious work of sorting faxes and petitions but it made me see how important this work is. Senator Kaine and the chief of staff drilled the point that responding to constituents is one of the most important aspects because it helps the office find out the issues that are important to not just big organizations but the constituents. I loved being able to learn so much from the staff members. One of my favorite parts was being able to attend hearings and learn from other members of the Senate. My absolute favorite part was when Senator Kaine would randomly pop into the mailroom and just sit down and chat with the interns for about ten or twenty minutes about how our week was or what we thought about a certain piece of legislation that was on the floor. It made my summer much more exciting knowing that the man I worked for actually cared what I thought and took time out of his day to talk with me.

My summer internship in D.C. really helped me see where I hope to go with my career goals. I had always hoped to work in politics, especially D.C. eventually, but after this summer I lean farther away from the hopes of a career in the Senate. I loved everyday of my internship and the people in my office. The opportunities that I was given were wonderful and I could have never have asked for anything better. I love the

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environment of the Senate and the thrill it can give you just walking down the hall. But I also saw the behind-the-scenes of how slow things can move. I do not want to close off the possibility of working in the Senate completely. If I were to work in the Senate I think that I would prefer to work on a committee, one that is focused on an issue that I am interested in. I also remain open to the possibility of working with an issue-based non-governmental organization in D.C., but doing governmental affairs.