

## Tonya Public Affairs Internship Report

Through support by the Tonya Public Affairs Fund I was able to work at the Business Industry Political Action Committee (BIPAC) this summer. BIPAC was established in 1963 as the first political action committee. Today it does not engage in any direct lobbying, but instead offers a wide range of tools and services to organizations so that they can be effective in reaching their own public policy goals. BIPAC has a two-pronged approach. Through their grassroots services they provide tools to organizations' employees so that they may be best informed to make political decisions. And through their PAC services BIPAC makes sure organizations' government relations teams are best equipped to advocate their specific interests. Put simply BIPAC works with organizations to get candidates elected then to hold those officials accountable once in office.

BIPAC is separated into two branches, political affairs and member services. The political affairs team provides both federal and state level political analysis. Virginia's upcoming gubernatorial elections were closely watched while I was interning. The member services branch works directly with member organization's government relations team. BIPAC creates and manages both PAC and grassroots websites for hundreds of large companies such as International Paper, Suntrust, and BP. Managing these websites involves working closely with member organizations to do a wide range of tasks, which include building up a website by writing code to updating daily content.

My internship coordinator's position was Grassroots Services Assistant. He worked one-on-one with the top level of member organizations. A large part of my

responsibilities were to update content to member websites. This meant a number of things. When member's sent us their own content, I would reconfigured text from a word document or email into a website page using BIPAC's portal system.

However sometimes I created original content to add to a member's website, this involved doing research on congressional voting records or legislator backgrounds.

For example, BP asked us to create a page that spotlighted certain freshman congress members, on both the state and federal level. I researched these officials' backgrounds and pass achievements then wrote up a biography and added the page to their website (that page can be seen [here](#)).

Another important task that I had was to hand-deliver letters from a member organization to every member of the House of Representatives. The letters were written by constituents, in opposition to a certain bill that was about to be presented on the floor. This task took a large amount of time and organization. I was put in charge of the project and was given a deadline to have it done by the end of the week. During that week I had to manage not only my own time, but also the other interns who were helping me with the project. It was a large-scale project that involved many pieces. By the end of the week all 435 letters were hand delivered to each Representative. This was a great project to work on not only because it helped me further develop my leadership and time-management skills. Because I worked in a Senate Office the year before I had seen the process of what happens with constituent mail once it comes into the offices but now I got to see the process of getting the letters to the offices.

I was also able to attend a number of events and meetings while working at BIPAC. During my internship BIPAC had its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner. This was a big event with over 300 guests and a congressional speaker. I went early to the event, helped set up and checked guest in at the registration desk. I was also able to attend insightful talks by Charlie Cook, a political forecaster, and Valerie Jarrett, President Obama's Senior Advisor. I was able to gain further understanding of the political process by sitting in on meetings with member organization's government relation teams and BIPAC staff. This was great because I was able to see first hand how government relations teams work and how they go about accomplishing their goals.

I learned a numerous things during my internship. The practical knowledge of how to manage a website; how to work under a strict deadline; how the lobbying process worked. But one of the most important things I will take away from this internship is that hard work does get noticed. When I did my interview with a public policy professional to gain funding, he told me how important working hard was. He said to work as hard as I possibly could at everything I was given, even if it was something as simple or boring as getting coffee or stuffing envelopes. He said that if you work hard enough at everything that is on your plate then it will get noticed. And he was right. During my internship I came early everyday, worked hard and didn't leave until everything was done. And everyone noticed, from the CEO to my direct boss to the other employees. It was a great internship that was made possible in part because of the Tonya Political Affairs Fund.