

Mid-year Report to the
IEEE-USA Government Fellowship Committee
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I have served since January in the office of Senator Ben Nelson (D-Nebraska). As expected at placement, my responsibilities so far this year have been almost exclusively Internet and telecommunication issues that arise in the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee on which the Senator serves. This focus is narrower than that of most Science Fellows, but it is exactly what I was hoping for.

A major focus of the Commerce Committee during the first half of this year has been the Communications Bill. The Bill entails at least ten different topics, but key elements include video franchising, universal service, and network neutrality. The Bill was recently passed out of the Commerce Committee, and may be going to the Senate floor this fall.

My work in the office has primarily centered on learning about these issues and advising the Senator and other office staff on them. I have worked extensively with Senator Nelson's Legislative Counsel who covers Commerce topics. This partnership with another congressional staffer has allowed me to focus more deeply in the issues than would have been possible if a single staffer were covering these areas.

My responsibilities have included:

Constituents -- Meeting with constituents interested in telecom issues is a significant responsibility. In telecom, these constituents are principally lobbyists for telecom companies, consumer groups, electronics companies, or industry trade groups. In the last 6 months, I've participated in about 70 such meetings.

Briefings -- Briefings on a single topic, directed at congressional staffers, are common. They often consist of a panel of lobbyists who offer a range of views. I attended about 20 such briefings to learn about topics in greater depth.

Hearings -- The Commerce Committee has held 16 hearings on issues related to the Communications Bill. This is a remarkably large number of hearings on a single bill, indicative of the breadth of the Communications Bill. I attended most of these hearings, as well as a few on other topics. For those hearings the Senator attends, we prepare a hearing memo, which summarizes the issue background, current law, proposed changes to law, policy recommendations, and suggested questions for hearing witnesses.

Staffing the Senator -- When the Senator meets with constituents, he is usually accompanied by at least one staffer. I staffed him in about 20 such meetings.

Telecom Policy Education -- While I know much more than congressional telecom staffers about technical aspects of telecommunications and the Internet, I knew relatively little at the beginning of the year about

telecommunications policy. Learning telecom policy with respect to the major issues in the Bill - including the history of telecom law, regulation, and litigation - has been a significant time investment. Learning about Nebraska telecom and the impact upon Nebraska of various telecom issues has been another significant time investment.

Telecom Policy Recommendations and Committee Markups -- The goal is to leverage this knowledge of telcom technology, policy, and impact to create good policy recommendations. On a subset of the range of topics included in the Communications Bill, my responsibility is to digest this information and to summarize it for the Senator through a mixture of memos and personal meetings. When the Commerce Committee votes on a bill and its amendments, we also prepare a summary of the provisions of the bill and each amendment and vote recommendations. For the Communications Bill, there were 240 amendments filed.

Telecom Legislation -- On a few selected topics, I have participated in formation of the legislation. Such efforts are often made in conjunction with staff from other Senators offices. A few of these efforts resulted in the Senator offering amendments. In particular, a few amendments were incorporated into the Communications Bill, and one amendment on engineering outreach efforts was incorporated into a bill on Innovation and Competitiveness.

I hope this list of responsibilities might give potential Fellows a brief idea of what a Science Congressional Fellow does. I expect to give some philosophical musings on the experience at the end of the year.