

Placement Report to the IEEE-USA Government Fellowship Committee

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Of all the offices I interviewed for placement for my fellowship year, the office of Senator Ron Wyden (Democrat from Oregon) offered me the greatest range of topics to cover. Although the legislative staff wanted me to spend most of my time on energy policy, they also wanted me for my telecommunications background. During my interviews with this office, I found the legislative staff members with whom I spoke to be extremely knowledgeable and experienced; I realized that I would be able to learn a great deal from them.

After a month in the office, my expectations have been exceeded. I have already learned much from my colleagues on the Senator's staff, who have welcomed me as a peer. While everyone in the office is always busy and very hard working, they have a very collegial working environment. This office also encourages the staff to be innovative and develop new ideas. As I expected, I have been working on several energy policy issues, ranging from renewable energy to energy efficiency. The urgency of these issues is heightened because the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, of which the Senator is a member, is drafting a comprehensive energy bill this Spring. My work includes researching various energy technologies and issues, reviewing proposed legislation, attending briefings, and meeting with lobbyists and interest groups. I even had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Steven Chu, the new Secretary of Energy. I ended my first month by drafting my own piece of legislation.

During my first month as a Fellow, I was also asked to look at some telecommunications issues. A major concern is that many people in the United States still do not have access to broadband capabilities. During my past industrial experience, I had the opportunity to work on this particular issue with one of the departments in the Executive Branch, where I learned of the relationship between broadband deployment and economic development, especially in rural areas. One of President Obama's agenda items, as he mentioned in his inaugural address, is to have a wider deployment of broadband to such areas.

My first month as a Fellow coincided with the start of a new Congress and the inauguration of a new president. The atmosphere in the office, in Congress, and in Washington was one of anticipation and excitement. When there is a presidential inauguration, Congress usually convenes to swear in the new members and then adjourns until after the inauguration. This year, with so much work to do, Congress was in session from the first week in January, the same week I arrived. I had been warned that it would be like trying to drink water from a fire hose because there was so much work to do from the outset. Fortunately, my years of consulting experience prepared me for this, and I had no trouble jumping in.

It has been nine months since I was selected as an IEEE Congressional Fellow. The AAAS started sending me information early last summer about the fellows' orientation program in

September. The orientation program ran two weeks, right after Labor Day, during which time we learned about various aspects of the Legislative and Executive Branches. This program also gave all the Congressional and Executive Branch Fellows a chance to meet each other. A few times during orientation, we Congressional Fellows were split off to have our own programs, geared to the Congressional environment. At the end of the Orientation Program, the Executive Branch Fellows began their assignments, and the Congressional Fellows started looking for positions on Capitol Hill. The AAAS facilitates this placement process by surveying Congressional offices and giving us a list of those Senators, Representatives, and committees interested in having a Fellow. We Congressional Fellows culled the list looking for common interests, and I started sending out letters by email asking for interviews. After two weeks of letters, emails, phone calls, and interviews, most Fellows had found positions, although I had not. One disadvantage that we IEEE Congressional Fellows have is that we start in January; I found that many offices wanted a Fellow who could begin immediately to replace a Fellow who had left at the end of August. Of the seven Fellows starting in January, only a few found positions within the first two weeks of interviews. I am fortunate to live in New Jersey; so I returned to Washington for two days in mid-October for five more interviews and was offered a position in Senator Wyden's office. In contrast to this downside, the advantage of starting in January is that the Fellowship year coincides with the Congressional year; so I will be here for a full congressional cycle from beginning to end.

My recommendation to other IEEE Congressional Fellows is to plan to spend four weeks in Washington: two for the AAAS Orientation followed by at least two weeks of interviewing. Even if you do not find a position immediately, you will have made the initial contacts with the offices and can follow up later with phone interviews. The AAAS orientation program is outstanding and not to be missed. It helped me to feel very confident walking into the Senate office in January to start my fellowship.