How does an office on Capitol Hill operate?

An exploration of Maternal Mortality & gender inequity within the healthcare system

What are some personal takeways?
DEAR READER,

My name is Lucy Chuang and I am a rising Junior in the Politics Department at Princeton University. Coming from the great state of Georgia, I was primarily interested in Congresswoman Sewell’s Southern district because of how similar the socioeconomic needs, demographic makeup, and community values are in our respective home states. More specifically, the contemporary conversation regarding reproductive rights within both the Georgia and Alabama state legislatures piqued my desire to learn more about the lawmaking process.

The Office of Congresswoman Terri Sewell serves the people of Alabama’s 7th Congressional District. Each and every staffer embodies a deep passion for social justice and civil rights— their work is ultimately connected to the revolutionary legacy of the cities Birmingham, Selma, and Montgomery. The Office of Congresswoman Sewell advocates for local constituents and assesses the needs within the community to create effective change on a broader legislative level.

Why this format?

Effectively, I wanted to use a magazine format to pay tribute to the often "unglamorous" and grueling work that goes into making a positive change in the government. Throughout my internship, every single person in my office worked tirelessly to serve their community without seeking personal recognition.
A QUICK THANK-YOU

My internship would not have been possible without help from:

The Leonard D. Schaeffer Fellows Foundation:
- The Schaeffer Fellows program exposes undergraduate students to government work and its impact through 10-week, full-time, high-level internships with elected officials and agencies at the federal, state and local levels. The program creates the opportunity for participants to become engaged citizens and develop an informed view of government service and operations.
- Thanks, Mr. Schaeffer, Ms. Willa Erickson, and Ms. Erica McCann!

The Office of Congresswoman Terri A. Sewell:
- Congresswoman Sewell aims to give back to students in the Princeton University community (her alma mater). Her experience as an undergrad intern working in Senator Shelby’s office was invaluable in her journey to become a member of the House of Representatives.
- A special thanks to my internship coordinator, Perry Hamilton!
- I am also grateful for the other staffers: Cachavious English, Hillary Beard, Robert Nuttall, Evan Geisemann, Jackie McGuinness and Scott Harris.

The Princeton Internships in Civic Service:
- I am grateful for Ms. Jeri Schaefer, Ms. Kayla Moffett, and Ms. Mary Kim for providing crucial advice during my time in D.C.
THE DAY TO DAY

Everyday, I arrived to work at 9AM and greet the office. While the House of Representatives was in session, the halls were normally buzzing with reporters waiting outside of hearing rooms.

During my time, I conducted policy-based research, drafted a Congressional Report on Maternal Mortality, and created an informational pamphlet on "Signs of Human Trafficking" for district churches.

By Lucy Chuang

1 PUT OUT NEWSPAPERS & WORK ON THE MAIL MEMO

The first thing I do when I go into the office is put out the daily newspapers so when anyone enters the office they have the most up-to-date information at their disposal.

I also record all pertinent mail into a single document so that Congresswoman Sewell can be briefed in an effective and transparent manner.

2 CHECK CALENDAR/HEARING SCHEDULE

Two benefits of working in Congresswoman Sewell's office are the numerous interest areas to explore and enthusiasm from the staff.

For example, if I want to follow a staffer into a meeting about "Prison Incarceration for the Youth," all I have to do is ask.

3 ANSWER CONSTITUENT CALLS

This one is big!

Constituent calls offer an intimate mode of communication between the local and federal levels. Answering phone calls allows the staff to gauge public sentiment.

4 PERSONAL PROJECT: CR ON MATERNAL MORTALITY

I was particularly interested in researching maternal mortality because of a tragic article that was released about Myra Powell, a mother who lost her twin sons due to lack of adequate healthcare.

5 PERSONAL PROJECT: PAMPHLET ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING

On top of researching maternal mortality/current legislation, I worked on an informational guide to identifying the signs of human trafficking. This issue is facilitated along the highway system to the Hartsfield-Jackson Airport.

In the developing world alone, maternal mortality has increased by 26.6 percent from the years 2000-2014. It is estimated that about 60 percent of maternal mortality in the United States could be reduced or eliminated with better care. Improving knowledge of preconception health, providing access to prenatal care, and improving medical and safety tools have the potential to change life and death situations.

Data from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention indicates that Black women are 4 times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than White Women.

An even deadly combination? Being poor, Black, and Southern. Myra Powell fits all of these categories.

Furthermore, lack of quality care and lack of medical research surrounding maternal health also contributes to the high maternal mortality rate. Women from Birmingham to Camden are especially vulnerable because of the long commute time to rural hospitals and deficit of OB-GYN providers who can best suit their needs.

It is clear that tragedies like Myra's will continue to occur unless every single Member of Congress takes action to specifically combat maternal mortality.
Impactful Moments

1. Congresswoman Sewell's Story

"Congresswoman Terri A. Sewell is in her fifth term representing Alabama’s 7th Congressional District. She is one of the first women elected to Congress from Alabama in her own right and is the first black woman to ever serve in the Alabama Congressional delegation.

A proud product of Alabama’s rural Black Belt, Congresswoman Sewell was the first black valedictorian of Selma High School. She is an honors graduate of Princeton University and Oxford University in England and received her law degree from Harvard Law School."
- https://sewell.house.gov/meet-terri/abbreviated-biography

2. Attending Hearing on Kids in Cages

While my office is not a border state, the staffers were greatly understanding of my personal investment in better understanding immigration issues and immigration law in the United States.

The purpose of the Kids In Cages hearing was to "examine the impact of the Trump Administration’s deterrence policies on the humanitarian crisis at the border, recent reports of dangerous conditions and medical neglect, and the lack of accountability for abuse and misconduct at detention facilities."

3. Meeting One of My Personal Heroes, Congresswoman Judy Chu

"Congresswoman Judy Chu was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in July 2009. She represents the 27th Congressional District, which includes Pasadena and the west San Gabriel Valley of southern California.

In 2009, she became the first Chinese American woman elected to Congress in history."

She is a rare example of what is possible for other female Asian American students.
- https://chu.house.gov/about/full-biography

“I’m benefitting from the sacrifices and seeds sown by Shirley Chisholm, John Lewis, and so many others. Those of us who are beneficiaries owe it to have a season of service in which we try to give back.”
- Congresswoman Sewell

Representative John Lewis
Representative Terri Sewell
Representative Judy Chu

hey, that's me!
OVERALL, I HAVE HAD AN EXTREMELY EYE-OPENING SUMMER AS A PICS INTERN!

I HAVE GAINED CONFIDENCE IN MY ABILITY TO LEARN NEW TASKS (WRITING MEMOS, DOING RESEARCH, PROBLEM-SOLVING) WHILE ALSO PUTTING MY CREATIVE/ARTISTIC NATURE TO GOOD USE.

THE PROFESSIONAL ENVIRONMENT OF CONGRESSWOMAN SEWELL’S OFFICE ENCOURAGED ME TO REEVALUATE MY BEHAVIOR WHILE ALSO CRAFTING A BRAND UNIQUE TO ME.

I LEARNED THAT, IN ORDER TO EFFECTUATE CHANGE, ONE MUST BUILD COALITIONS, LISTEN CLOSELY, AND ALSO RECOGNIZE THE DEEP SIMILARITIES IN WHAT SEEMS TO BE A RADICALLY CONTRADICTORY SITUATION.

THE RELATIONSHIPS I FORMED WITH MY COWORKERS ALLOWED ME TO BETTER APPRECIATE THE HARD WORK THAT GOES INTO CREATING BILLS THAT ENSURE THE FREEDOM AT THE BALLOT BOX, IN THE WORKPLACE, AND IN SOCIETY.