

The saying goes "Don't judge a man until you've walked a mile in his shoes." Many are quick to judge Congress, but spending a year in Washington, DC working in health policy allows you to walk in those shoes for a few months. The practical on the job exposure is beyond anything that could be achieved in reading, doing a day hill visit, or speaking with others about policy. As a fellow you are afforded the time to provide your medical knowledge and expertise to congress.

Working in Senator Jack Reed's Office, from Rhode Island, was an amazing opportunity in a number of ways. Having just completed my residency at Brown in Providence, Rhode Island, I often found myself sitting in constituent meetings with physicians with whom I previously worked. Knowing the medical landscape prior to working in the Senator's office allowed me to address issues on a more personal level. When Graduate Medical Education funding arose as an area of interest I was able to call the head of the GME committee I had served on and ask how changes would affect residents and faculty in the program where I had trained.

I spent a portion of my time on constituent related issues, meeting frequently with physician and patient advocacy groups to discuss concerns. I was involved in coordinating two events in Rhode Island. One was a forum on the Medicare Prescription Drug Plan at a senior center to discuss the program and elicit from those in attendance what changes needed to be made. Another was a nursing roundtable focused on statewide coordination of nursing education and workforce development.

I also was involved in a variety of national issues. A large portion of my time was spent on reauthorization of the Ryan White Care Act, which provides extensive medical and social support for individuals and families affected by HIV. The work I did in Senator Reed's office was vital to expanding the scope of education and coverage of co-infection of HIV and Hepatitis C, currently the leading cause of death in AIDS patients.

The year in Washington is an amazing opportunity to gain an understanding of how the political structure is organized and functions. It is also a time to contribute your skills as a physician to this process. The personal contacts made and knowledge gained does not dissolve at the end of the twelve months. The experience allows for amazing insight into the political process, so crucial to research and clinical physicians.