This summer I worked in the United States House of Representatives in the office of Congressman Kurt Schrader from Oregon’s 5th District from late May until the first of August. It is a unique district, that I call home. The largest city in the district is Salem, however it does encompass a small part of Portland. The 5th district is largely agricultural, and is split almost totally equally between registered Democrats and Republicans. Congressman Schrader is a conservative Democrat who is currently running for his 4th term in office. He serves on the Agriculture and Budget Committees and is a member of the Blue Dog Democrat Caucus.

I was one of two interns who worked in Congressman Schrader’s office this summer. Given the small number of interns in the office, I was able to become quite close to the staff and was given lots of responsibility in the Congressman’s office. Certain tasks were required of me each day. I was to arrive in the office between 8:45 and 9:00. The first thing I did was deliver the papers and various political journals to the Congressman, scheduler and each staffer. I also read the Oregonian and all of the local papers from the district each morning, and determined which articles were most pertinent to the Congressman and sent them to the Press Secretary and Chief of Staff. This was one of my favorite tasks, as I enjoyed working with the press and learning about political communications.

The bulk of work that I did as an intern was centered around correspondence. I read all of the emails, paper mail, faxes and answered calls from constituents. I was
required to keep a daily correspondence log of calls, emails and paper mail. I also
put the different types of mail into batches and assigned it to the appropriate staffer.
I then filed all of the paper mail into folders based upon topic. Answering calls from
constituents was both the most fun yet difficult part of the job. Many controversial
issues were debated in Congress this summer, chiefly among them; were net neutrality,
veterans health and immigration. Often constituents who called in were confused on
these complex issues, or had very extreme views on them. As a representative of the
office, it was my job to handle even the most frustrated of callers with respect and do
my best to take a message or answer their questions.

Another important aspect of my internship that I loved, was giving constituent
tours of the Capitol. Congressman Schrader’s office works incredibly hard to be
hospitable and friendly with constituents, given that people who come to visit have
traveled across the country and this may be their only trip to the East Coast. When
people came to visit the office, we always immediately greeted them and offered them
water and really worked to get to know our visitors. I took many families on tours of
the Capitol, generally I gave at least 3-4 tours each week. I worked hard to make my
tours engaging and informative, I received excellent feedback from visitors about my
tours, which always made me feel great! I think that my ability to talk with and welcome
constituents and visitors into our office was a huge help to the staff assistant and
scheduler, they never had to worry if they were busy or out of the office that visitors
would not be taken care of.
My experience on the Hill this summer was amazing. I was incredibly lucky to work in an office where I never felt like an “intern”. The staff members made me feel included and like part of the team. They invited me to receptions, hearings and answered any questions that I had. Congressman Schrader’s office truly takes the time to teach interns and treats internships like educational experiences, not as people to get coffee and make copies. This openness and friendly nature made all the difference and tremendously impacted my internship. The office encouraged me to attend much of the Intern Lecture Series, they always gave me the time off to go hear the speakers that came. I heard Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan, Senator McCaskill, Majority Leader McCarthy and Minority Whip Hoyer to name a few.

I began my internship with an open mind. I honestly thought that if I hated politics, that I still had two years left at Sewanee and could always change my major, but if I loved it, that would be great too. After completing this internship I have no doubt that I am called to work in public service. I was fortunate to work for a Congressman who truly strives to do what is best for the American people and a passionate and hardworking staff who supported him and his initiatives. I have been inspired to come back to Washington next summer and I want to work on the Hill when I graduate from Sewanee. I am also interested in pursuing a graduate degree in political communications and work as a communications director and press secretary. I feel so fortunate to have been given this opportunity, it has forever shaped me and my career.
goals, and it would not have been possible without the Tonya Public Affairs fund and tremendous support from the Politics department. Thank you!