

Serving as an intern on Capitol Hill was an experience second to none. The Office Senator Carl Levin's is a very active legislative office with a focus on domestic policy being front and center. The foundations of Public Policy were experienced first hand in a variety of ways. These foundations of policy were experienced during the internship from the early steps of formulation, to research with Legislative Assistants on reauthorization of pending legislation. During my internship I was trained to utilize the Congressional Research Service and the Legislative Information System. The Capitol Hill internship experience provided me with great insight to the federal legislative process and how policy ideas become a reality. This report will highlight and examine how public policy was applied during my internship with Senator Levin's Office.

One of the core principals of public policy is research and formulation. As a hill intern legislative research is applied often. During my time as an intern a variety of legislative research tasks were assigned. Jackie Parker, Deputy Legislative Director, assigned me to gather information about a house bill regarding organ donation. Senator Levin wished to introduce a similar/brother bill in the Senate. My tasks began paging through witness testimony from the House Subcommittee on Health to determine which witnesses felt that this bill, creating a "National Live Organ Donner Center" would prove to be an effective policy. The policy problems were highlighted; too much demand and not enough supply. Thousands of people wait each day and it is estimated that nine people die a day waiting for an organ transplant. This legislation introduced by Congressmen Clay (D-MO), would provide more incentives for employers to encourage their employees to become an organ donor. The policy problem identified during my research is that Kidneys donated from a living person function more effectively in the

recipient that organs originating from a deceased person. Currently, The Department of Health and Human Services offer many incentives for employees wishing to become organ donors. Medicare benefits are offered up to six weeks and paid leave time are offered. The federal system of employment incentives for employees wishing to become organ donors has proved quite successful and this legislation would provide incentives such as Medicaid benefits to employers in the private sector. The legislation was introduced in the house and has been referred to back to the House Ways and Means Committee. The brother bill being offered by Senator Levin is currently being formed, and my research on this topic is being used as Jackie Parker drafts the legislation for Senator Levin. The principles of policy research and formulation were applied heavily in this legislative issue.

The Capitol Hill internship provided me with the principles of policy evaluation and how poorly implemented policies either have serious organizational flaws or violate the United States Constitution or both. The fundamental principal of evaluation is established in the United States Senate by the principal of reauthorization of polices every five years, such as the Farm Bill and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. In writing legislative correspondence to Michigan constituents, I was able to evaluate policy from the perspective of Senator Levin's Office. One major piece of correspondence that I authored focused on the evaluation of a legally flawed policy enacted by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The DHS in efforts to combat illegal immigration wished to add their own set of laws/requirements on employer's receiving a "No-match" letter from the Social Security Administration (SSA). These "No-match" letters indicated that an employees name and social security number do not match. The poor implemented

policy failed to consider jurisdictional issues between the SSA and the DHS. The No-Match Letter dispute was legally challenged in the state of California. On August 31, 2007, a number of labor unions challenged the No-match program and immigrant rights groups, including the AFL-CIO, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the National Immigration Law Center. Judge Maxine Chesney of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California ruled a halt to the implementation of the new enforcement measures and stopped the SSA from sending out the first round of no-match letters to employers containing DHS warnings (AFL-CIO v. Chertoff, N.D. Cal., No. 07-4472, temporary restraining order issued 8/31/07).

According to the AFL-CIO, the DHS no-match rule does not have the authority to create liability under the Immigration Control and Reform Act. The DHS attempted to obtain the authority to use SSA data for enforcement efforts as part of the comprehensive immigration overhaul that failed in the Senate. The application of policy evaluation was critical to my duties as an intern in drafting legislative correspondence for members of Senator Levin's legislative staff.

Throughout the semester, I was asked to attend committee hearings and briefings on behalf of legislative and committee staff. The principal of identifying policy issues/problems and initial implementation phases was applied heavily during the course of my internship through the attendance of committee hearings and briefings. The Joint Economic Committee (JEC), investigating the Sub prime Lending Crisis held a hearing to unveil their report on this policy debacle. During the committee hearing I jotted down notes and reported back to the staff on the relevant details of the proceedings. The JEC Report on the Sub-prime Crisis estimates that 2 million Sub-prime Homes could go into

foreclosure.¹ JEC Chairman, Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY) said, “State by state, the economic costs from the Sub-prime debacle are shockingly high. From New York to California, we are headed for billions on lost wealth, property values, and tax revenues.” The JEC report also highlighted some critical policy problems facing the Sub-prime mortgage debacle. Based on state-level data the report estimates by 2009, unless policy action is taken to prevent foreclosures that 2 million foreclosures may occur by the time the riskiest sub-prime adjustable rate mortgages (ARMs) reset over the course of this year and next. Approximately \$71 billion in housing wealth will be directly destroyed because each foreclosure reduces the value of a home. States will also lose more than \$917 million in property tax revenue as a result of the destruction of housing wealth caused by Sub-prime foreclosures.² The state of Michigan has a projected economic cost of the Sub-prime Mortgage Crisis of \$3,121,450,570 this includes lost in home values, neighboring property values and property tax revenues.³ Soon after the JEC report was released, several pieces of legislation were introduced aimed at regulating mortgage companies.

Last week, I attended a Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs subcommittee on Oversight hearing on behalf of a staff member of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (PSI). This hearing was evaluating the policy response of certain federal agencies in the event of a Radiation Dispersal Device (RDD) attack. The subcommittee was investigating the status of U.S. response following an RDD attack. The witness list included members from the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), Department of Energy: Office of Counterterrorism, and the Government Accountability Office (GAO). All the witnesses agreed that terror response

¹ Joint Economic Committee Report (JEC): Subprime crisis to cost billions. October 25, 2007: Page 2.

² JEC Report Page 2.

³ JEC Report Page 3.

plans have improved greatly since 9/11. Mr. Cannon, Assistant Administrator for Disaster Operations at FEMA concluded that RDD's do present a threat but that threat is rather minuscule because it is difficult to produce and with increased security measures it would be difficult to deliver the radiation at a high enough level to cause any real harm. Panic would be high but the real danger that an RDD presents is relatively low. Each of the federal department present at the hearing gave 2-minute opening statements at how their departments have RDD disaster response plans in place. These plans have been implemented into their department policies, but claim additional preparation is needed. Senator Alkaka (D-HI) questioned the real effectiveness of these plans and if they would really be effective in an event of a RDD attack. The committee was investigating and evaluating the policies of these individualized RDD disaster response plans. I was able to report to the PSI staff on the major findings/investigations of the committee, a practice that was applied largely throughout my internship.

An internship with Senator Levin's Office teaches one about the complexity of the legislative process. It is not only complex but also lengthy, major pieces of legislation take months if not years to reach the Senate floor. Appropriations legislation contains over 2,000 earmarks in federal dollars and in most cases in bills over 1,000 pages long. This internship affected my understanding of those principals to be to simplistic. The policy process involves numerous if not thousands of actors, from the 535 members of Congress themselves, to lobbying groups on K Street, non-profits, and from constituents themselves. The policy process is based upon compromise and hard work. In my experiences, everyone worked in a professional and nonpartisan way. The internship experience enhanced my understanding of the committee process and how policy

disagreements about implementation and evaluation are really hashed out. Each Senate office operates as its own separate entity within a larger system of networks. Every office has a mini-war room with a press office with three or more individuals monitoring all news sources and keeping the Senator up to speed with current news and buzz.

The job market is strong and growing in Washington D.C., with a high turnover rate among staffers on the hill. Non-profit jobs increased by 33 percent between 1995 and 2003, from 163,943 to 218,344 jobs.⁴ The federal government expects within the next few years nearly one-third of the entire federal workforce will be eligible to retire. About 193,000 vital federal jobs will be available soon.⁵ This internship experience has given me a basic grounding in how the legislative process really operates. Through my experiences on “The Hill”, I am more inclined to pursue staff and legislative positions on Capitol Hill. I enjoy the high energy and atmosphere of the office and feel as though I can really make a difference in terms of policy because you work directly with the Senator on direct legislation. Congressional staff are relatively small compared to staffs in the private sector. If you are dedicated and work hard, there are many opportunities for advancement within the system. The long hours seem worth it if you enjoy the political scene and really want to have an impact on U.S. domestic and foreign policy.

Works Cited

- 1) Joint Economic Committee Report (JEC): Subprime crisis to cost billions. October 25, 2007: Page 2-3.
- 2.) Sangillo, Gregg. 2007. For the Cause. National Journal November 17, 2007: 27

⁴ Sangillo, Gregg. 2007. For the Cause. National Journal November 17, 2007: 27

⁵ Sangillo Page 27.