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Trolling the Partisan Waters of Congress: The 2005–2006 Class of Congressional Fellows

Jeff Biggs, APSA, Congressional Fellowship Program

No year is like any other for the successive classes of APSA Congressional Fellows. Over the last few years Fellows have encountered the impeachment of a president, the repercussions of the terrorist bombings of New York City's Twin Towers and the Pentagon, the invasion of Iraq, and the devastation of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast following Hurricane Katrina. One of this year's 2004–2005 Fellows, Amy Steigerwalt, is still waiting for the University of New Orleans to open so she can resume her teaching position.

This year, the 2005–2006 Fellows will encounter an off-year election and a highly partisan Congress in which the Republican leadership and majorities in both the chambers are displaying fissures, uncertainties, and even power vacuums for the first time since 2000. If anything characterizes the new atmosphere it is flux and new and relatively unfamiliar personalities exerting a surprising level of political muscle.

As the Fellows complete their three-week intensive orientation and begin searching for the "right fit" in a congressional assignment in this political party-dominated atmosphere, they are faced with far more uncertainties than their predecessors were some 40 years ago when the "players," beginning with the committee chairs, were far more recognizable. In the 1960s a freshman member of the House and a Congressional Fellow would probably have been equally impressed by unchallenged wielders of power. In 1964, newly-elected Representative Thomas S. Foley (D-WA) described being a new member of the Agriculture Committee chaired by Harold Cooley (D-NC).

He strode out, took his chair at the head of the dais, rapped the gavel several times, and announced that he wanted to say a few words to the new members. 'I hate and detest, hate and detest, hearing senior members of this committee, of either party, interrupted by junior members of this committee, of either party,' he said. 'You new members in particular will find that you will require some time, some of you months, others of you regrettably probably years, before you develop sufficient knowledge and experience to contribute constructively to our work.

In the meantime, silence and attention,' rapping the gavel for emphasis, 'silence and attention is the rule for new members of this committee.'

The situation became bleaker when one freshman Member, who had over-stepped the chairman's injunction, was declared dead.

You can come and sit in your chair. You can attend the meetings, but I'm not going to recognize you to speak. And you won't be able to amend any bills in the committee. On the floor you won't be given any time to speak in general debate, and I'll oppose any amendment you offer. And you won't be allowed to travel anywhere. And nothing you want to do for your district will come out of this committee. Soon as I find out it's you who wants it, it will be stopped. Let me give you some advice. Get off the committee. You're a zombie on this committee. You're a walking, living, dead man. (*Honor in the House: Speaker Tom Foley*, Washington State Press, 1999)

Although the Member was later revived, with suitable apologies, those years were nothing like what new Fellows encounter today, where new Members play a far more active role. The choices for assignment are far broader with few of the old guideposts for direction. The 2005–2006 Fellows have come face-to-face with what political scientists have viewed as the transition from the committee to party-controlled Congress. For many, such as the journalists, and even many political scientists, who have become accustomed to viewing politics from the position of an independent, they are now encountering an institution where there are few, if any, independents among the staff.

While much of the new environment is familiar to the political scientist Fellows, the journalists, Federal fellows, Robert Wood Johnson health policy, and international fellows are having to come to grips with concepts such as the permanent campaign and the inside game and the outside game. For this environment, the goals of the November orientation are particularly important—to introduce Fellows to the legislative process and policy concerns likely to see action

in the 2nd session of the 109th Congress; to give them a sense of the distinct working environment on the Hill; to start them on the important exercise of networking new contacts; and to acquaint the Fellows with alumni who can help them maximize the value of being a Fellow.

Alumni have always been the bedrock of the 85-plus speakers in the orientation. Looking at political scientist alumni alone, this year the roster included: Norm Ornstein (1969–1970), Resident Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and Chair of the fellowship's Advisory Committee; Tom Mann (1969–1970), W. Averill Harriman Chair, The Bookings Institution; David Auerswald (1998–1999), National War College; Paul Herrnson (Steiger Fellow, 1989–1990), Director, Center for American Politics and Citizenship, University of Maryland; Frances Lee (Steiger Fellow, 2002–2003), Department of Government and Politics, University of Maryland; Forrest Maltzman (1994–1995), Department of Political Science, George Washington University; James Thurber (1973–1974), Director, Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies, American University; Christopher Deering (1984–1985), Chair, Department of Political Science, George Washington University; Arthur Burris (YEARS?), Deputy Minority Staff Director, House Budget Committee; Bill Koetzle (1997–1998), Assistant to the Speaker of the House for Policy; and John Haskell (1997–1998), Governmental Affairs Institute, Georgetown University.

Each year we draw on recent Fellows to staff a series of panels discussing how best to maximize the fellowship experience, and how best to approach the interview process to insure that Fellows can find the right office assignment. The composition of these panels reflects the increasing eclectic composition of an average class of 30–35 Fellows. This year the panelists included: Kel Britvec (1999–2000), Chief, Pentagon Support Division, Joint Intelligence Task Force for Combating Terrorism, Defense Intelligence Agency; Peter Gadzinski (2002–2003), Senior Adviser, Director for Business Practices, Office of eDiplomacy, Department of State, and formerly Director, Department of State Congressional Liaison Office; Brian E. Harvey (YEARS?), Director, Office of Gastroenterology Products, CDER, Food and Drug Administration,

Department of Health and Human Services; Nancy Schoenberg 2002–2003), Program Policy Officer, Office of Disability Programs, Social Security Administration; Aimee Curl (2004–2005), *Federal Times*; Willa Green (2004–2005), Department of Labor; Richard Litsey (2004–2005), Social Security Administration; and Christopher McShane (2004–2005), State Department.

To ease the Fellows' anxieties about trying to find the right fit between their own long-term goals and the specific office needs, the fellowship sends out an announcement about the current year's class to the chiefs-of-staff for every Senate and House personal office and the majority and minority staff directors for every committee—750-plus messages—asking if they want a Fellow and to submit a contact name and issues they want covered. This year we received more than 60 requests and many from new offices in which this past year's Fellows broke new ground: Senators Susan Collins (R-ME), Olympia Snowe (R-ME), Kent Conrad (D-ND), Michael Enzi (R-WY), The Senate Finance Committee (Max Baucus, D-MT), and the House Republican Policy Committee.

Part of this new congressional response to the fellowship stems from the Fellows interviewing far more widely than in the past as they recognize the exercise as part of the educational process—even interviewing in offices in which they have no real political compatibility but about which they are curious. Even before the end of this year's orientation, one journalist Fellow has interviewed in 15 offices.

The final installment in this year's orientation is the Congressional Research Office's Advanced Legislative Process Institute. This two-day session presents an awesome amount of detail: "Raising and Considering Measures on the House Floor" by Walter Oleszek; "The Amending Process in the House" with Elizabeth Rybicki; "Special Rules and the Rules Committee in the House" with Mike Koempel; "Committee Hearings, Markups, and Reports" with Chris Davis; "The Tactical Use of House Floor Procedure: A Case Study from the Congressional Record" with Judy Schneider; "Raising and Considering Measures in the Senate" with Tom Carr; "Unanimous Consent Agreements" with Rick Beth; "The Amending Process in the Senate" with Jim Saturno; "The Tactical Use of Senate Floor Procedure: A Case Study from the Congressional Record" with Betsy Palmer; and "Resolving Legislative Differences—Conference Committees" with Elizabeth Rybicki. While it sounds a bit daunting, this past

year the session proved its utilitarian value as a surprising number of Congressional Fellows became actively involved in drafting legislation from controlling the illegal sale of methamphetamines to expanding U.S. free trade zones.

As the 53rd Congressional Fellowship class prepares to embark upon their hands-on congressional experience, their most immediate benchmark tends to be the class that preceded them and whose evaluations they read for guidance. Without any mathematical regressions to prove the point, we fall back on anecdotal evidence and offer two examples among many.



Front row (L to R): Liping Zhang, Leona Cuttler, Kathy Hebert, Veronica Jones, Amy Jaspersen, Sharon Rapport, Kelly Trimble; **Second row (L to R):** Caroline-Lucie Ulbrich, Michelle L. Stefanick, Sarah England, Robin Hemphill, Fresia Rodriguez Cadavid, Jeffrey Biggs, Sharon Elizabeth Hudson-Dean; **Third row (L to R):** Samer Mustafa abu Libdeh, Michael Crespin, Neil Simon, Colleen Shogan, Martina Bebin; **Fourth row (L to R):** Sebastian Soto, Alfred Pheley, Richard Driscoll, Laura King Kellams, Stephen Ceccoli, Francis Bires, Kenneth Vogel; **Fifth row (L to R):** Jerry Hibbits, Andrew Barrett, Roger, Johns, Sebastian Schwark, James Roberts, III

Political scientist Jennifer Nicholl Victor (2004–2005) returned to her position at the University of Pittsburgh from where she wrote:

I'm teaching two Congress classes this term (one undergrad-level and one Ph.D.-level). I find myself drawing on my fellowship experience a LOT! As expected, the fellowship has provided great insight and nice teaching tools for me. I like showing off to my

students with off-hand statements like, "I met John Roberts, and. . . ' I'm also trying to get a book project going. I'm off to a bit of a slow start, but my fellowship experience is helping me out there too.

And, from a different part of the world, German Marshall Fund Fellow Hans Michael Kloth returned to cover politics for *Der Spiegel*. A true networking aficionado, he sent his fellowship colleagues a recent interview he had with U.S. political scientist Robert Kagan, known by many for his "America is from Mars, Europe is from Venus" theory focusing on developments in the trans-Atlantic relationship.

These two examples also reflect the eclectic character of contemporary classes of APSA Congressional Fellows. The senior Fulbright Fellows give a good sense of how international the fellowship has become. This year's Fellows include Jordanian Samer Mustafa abu Libdeh, who directs the Interaction Forum in Amman which seeks to find common ground between Palestinians and Israelis, Moroccan Mustapha Khalfi, who is head of the political division of leading Rabat daily *Attajdid*, Chilean Jose Sebastian Soto Velasco, who serves as a senior legislative researcher for the Santiago think tank *Libertad y Desarrollo* (Liberty and Development), and Chinese Liping Zhang, who is an Associate Fellow at the Institute of American Studies at Beijing's Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

The staff at APSA continues to receive updates from former Fellows who are interested in staying in touch with their colleagues and expanding their network with former Fellows. You can update your profile on the web site, www.cfpnet.org. Alternately, you can send your name, fellowship year, work and home addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, and office assignments to either cfp@apsanet.org or to APSA Congressional Fellowship Program, 1527 New Hampshire Avenue,

NW, Washington, DC 20036. We are also happy to accept updates on the whereabouts of alumni, which we will soon begin posting on our web site.

The Congressional Fellowship Program continues to benefit from the generosity of MCI, Congressional Quarterly, Inc., the William E. Steiger trust, and the annual contributions of program alumni.