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Working in Congressman Ben Cardin's (D-MD) office was educational, exhilarating, and sometimes frustrating. The view of politics from vantage point of a House office was close-up. I learned how Ben Cardin thought about issues, and how his counterparts thought (or didn't). I learned how local constituents influence elected representatives and the power and mechanisms that these elected representatives have to bring federal resources to their districts. Equally instructive was learning about the Congressional staff—about their perceptions, especially of the medical community. Easily the most enjoyable experience was working with the legislative counsel in drafting two major bills. Not so enjoyable was watching both of those bills sink like stones without any serious discussion of their merits. The relationships between professional organizations, lobbyists, Congressional staff and the press are far more complex than I could possibly have imagined.

The experience left me with a working, if somewhat cynical understanding of our political system. This knowledge has been immensely helpful in working in my new position at the NIH administering scientific programs and in collaborating with other federal agencies. I recommend the experience to anyone who is interested in working with the political process and willing to enter an entirely different world for a year.