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Daniel Kiel

“What do you call a bunch of lawyers at the bottom of the ocean?”

“A good start.”

It always seems to be the same punch line – the world does not need even one more lawyer. Swayed in my youth by these profound social commentaries (jokes), I concluded that I would not be a lawyer. I wanted to become a politician, instead, as if popular opinion were any gentler toward that profession. With this attitude and these plans, I applied for my internship at a congressman’s home office – an internship that convinced me that even if the world did not need another lawyer, the study of law was the best future for me.

I arrived my first day on the job, my mind filled with images of witnessing politics from within and meeting people of great importance. What I failed to realize was that working from a congressman’s Washington home office and working for a congressman’s district office involve very different tasks. While D.C. staffers research policy, work with legislation, and even mingle with public figures in the halls of the Capitol, the duties in the home office relate almost exclusively to assisting the district’s constituents.

My first duties included acting as an apprentice to a congressional caseworker who was responsible for solving problems constituents encountered with federal agencies. I had the opportunity of working directly with people and after only a few weeks, I was given the responsibility of handling casework of my own. As I worked, I noticed a great deal of similarity between the jobs of a caseworker and a lawyer. Both have the responsibility of acting as advocates to a constituent in front of an institution. Both must fully understand a client’s situation and translate it – to either a federal agency or a court. Both must present and argue their case to receive a favorable decision.

While I continued to enjoy working for the government, the passion I gained for assisting constituents helped focus my goals. I recognized that the aspect of politics that had drawn me was the prospect of helping people and I realized that in order to continue helping people, the study of law was the best future for me.

One case, in particular, convinced me that my goals and talents were best suited by a future in law. A constituent called, in tears as the way the Social Security Administration had treated her. This constituent’s husband had recently passed away and the SSA was questioning her eligibility for benefits. Aside from the sympathy I felt for her being forced to fight over money under such circumstances, I thought she had a legitimate argument to receive the money. I requested the case and got to work.

My first step was to get a better grasp on what the Social Security code said about such cases and to write a letter explaining why the constituent was entitled to the benefits. My background as a history major came to benefit me, as I had to research and argue my point to convince the reader. I finished the letter, got the Congressman's approval, and sent it on to Social Security, confident that they would issue a favorable decision.

The response I received was disappointing. My case had not been clear enough and the Social Security upheld the rejection. However, their denial seemed to overlook the circumstances of the husband's death – circumstances that I believed made her eligible for benefits according to the Social Security code. I sent a follow-up response clarifying my letter and waited again, eager to know if my argument had succeeded. The response came after several weeks and as I read the letter a smile crept over my face. The SSA reversed their decision and ruled in the constituent's favor. I called her to relay the good news and she joyfully and repeatedly thanked me.

This was just one of many cases I have had the opportunity to work on. Each case comes from a different constituent with a unique problem, so it is imperative that the caseworker be able to deal with many different situations. My experiences abroad, living for over a month in several foreign countries, have enabled me to adapt to unfamiliar situations and solve problems within. This versatility proved useful as I was given more responsibility at the office and the nature of my cases increased in scope and intricacy.

Studying law in Washington and Georgetown fits both the initial goals I had when coming to work at the Congressman's office as well as the passion I gained there for representing constituents. My interest in government and politics has not waned, as I have remained politically active, specifically with my involvement helping to register over 8,000 students with Texas Youth Vote. However, my strengths in research and formulating arguments, as well as my resourcefulness and persistence, have convinced me that the study of law is where my future lies, no matter whether the world needs another lawyer or not.