



Kelly A. Kryc

### The Best of Times

*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us... —Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities*

This timeless Dickens quote so eloquently captures the dichotomy of many real-world scenarios—and none more so than my brief experience working for Congress as the 2011–2012 GSA-USGS Congressional Science Fellow. I couldn't be more thrilled with the opportunity to serve as a science and technology fellow—regardless of the perceived (or real) challenges of working on the Hill in this particular Congress. I took a circuitous route to the fellowship that involved a decade of school and research, and another decade in science program management. In just four months, I can honestly say that this has been the best job of my life ("it was the best of times..."), and here's why:

As many of my predecessors have described, the fellowships start off with an exceptional two-week orientation facilitated by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). I think it is important to note that I was under the complete misconception that it is harder to get a Ph.D. in science than it is to learn how policy gets made in the United States. The term "drinking through a firehose" doesn't even start to describe how much information I have absorbed since starting the fellowship in September. For example, do you know what this means?

*Defeating the previous question on the motion to recommit with instructions in order to offer a substitute amendment to the amendment in the nature of a substitute.*

Neither do I. But, I hope to by the end of my fellowship year (thanks to the venerable Judy Schneider at the Congressional Research Service for providing the example above). Stay tuned.

The sudden realization that my high school government classes and college political science courses had woefully underprepared me for this endeavor, coupled with a crash-course in ethics, left

me a bit unsettled and mildly panicked. This feeling quickly abated, and we thirty-five 2011–2012 Congressional Fellows were set loose upon Congress to start our placement process. This was, by far, the most exhilarating two weeks of my life. I'm not confident I can describe the process to its full credit, but suffice it to say, at no other point in my career do I expect to have the unprecedented access to Hill staff and members of Congress as I did during that process.

Wanting to take full advantage of the opportunity, I interviewed as broadly as possible, which included meeting with people from individual member offices in both the House and the Senate, committee offices in both the House and the Senate, and offices representing both the majority and the minority parties. This year, there was an overwhelming interest by the congressional offices to attract a Fellow to work on energy and environment issues—a perfect alignment with the skill set offered by the four geoscience Fellows (AGU sponsored two Fellows this year, and GSA and AGI both sponsored one)—and an indication of the importance for continued support of the geoscience fellows in the future. Ultimately, I accepted an offer from the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, working for the majority staff on issues primarily pertaining to the water and power nexus.

In a recent *New York Times* poll, the approval rating of the United States Congress fell to an all-time low of 9% ("it was the worst of times..."). For context, the *Huffington Post* reported that 11% of Americans approve of the "U.S. going communist," 23% approve of banks, and 16% apparently approved of BP during the oil spill ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/16/congress-approval-rating-porn-polygamy\\_n\\_1098497.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/11/16/congress-approval-rating-porn-polygamy_n_1098497.html)). That said, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources has managed to stay productive in a time when the full Senate struggles to do so and, from my very brief exposure and limited perspective, serves as a great model for bipartisan cooperation in a difficult and challenging legislative environment.

For example, I have already worked on three oversight hearings, including one field hearing in West Virginia to examine Marcellus Shale Gas development and production, and a Subcommittee on Water and Power hearing on opportunities and challenges to address domestic and global water supply issues. Since I started in September, the full committee has conducted two business meetings to mark-up bills and move them to the Senate's Legislative Calendar for consideration. As an additional highlight, I was able to observe the committee process to consider the nomination of Arunava Majumdar to be Under Secretary of Energy (he was subsequently approved by the full Senate shortly thereafter). All in all, there hasn't been a shortage of things for an eager geologist to dig into. A couple of the things that have piqued my interest thus far, and that I plan to describe to you in more detail in my next report, include marine renewable energy,



industrial efficiency and advanced manufacturing, and the nexus of water and power.

In closing, as we enter another election year, and based on my observations of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, I choose to remain cautiously optimistic that we are capable of exiting Dickens' "winter of despair" and entering his "spring of hope." My email is listed below and I encourage you to write me directly if you have any questions.

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