



A Capital Summer

By LYNN GRIGSBY

Since 1971, the Cortez A.M. Ewing Foundation has enabled 77 University of Oklahoma students to participate in a 10-week summer internship program in congressional and governmental agency offices in Washington, D.C. Five undergraduates are selected each year from approximately 50 applicants after rigorous screening and interviews by a faculty-student committee headed by the program's on-campus coordinator, political science professor John W. Wood. Ewing interns each receive a \$1,200 grant from the foundation and a \$120 weekly stipend from the sponsoring office. College credit is available on an optional basis for those who elect to write a research paper based on their work in Washington.

Establishment of the foundation was the outgrowth of a desire by several of his former students to honor Ewing,

a Research Professor of Government and one of the University's most distinguished professors from 1928 until his death in 1962. Instrumental in forming the foundation were its chairman, Marcus Cohn, a prominent Washington, D.C., attorney; the Honorable Carl Albert, former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives; the late John Fischer, former editor of *Harper's Magazine*; and Dean E. Wooldridge, the Los Angeles scientist/businessman who was one of the founders of the electronics firm of Thompson, Ramo, Wooldridge, now TRW, Inc.

The Ewing internship program also receives support from the University of Oklahoma's Carl Albert Congressional Studies Center, where a number of Ewing fellows have completed an area of study on the Congress.

We were not the only college students arriving in Washington, D.C., on Memorial Day weekend to become summer interns in congressional offices. We had hundreds of colleagues from all over the United States, including several fellow Oklahomans. But the five of us felt very special, not only to be experiencing the summer of our lives—the excitement, glamor and prestige of working in the nation's capital—but also because we were carrying on a Sooner tradition. We were the 1985 Cortez A.M. Ewing Fellows, and we took our status seriously. We intended to get every benefit possible from this unique opportunity.

Home for the next 10 weeks was a George Washington University dormitory. The location, right in the center of Washington, was ideal—directly across from the hospital, 15 minutes from the Capitol, 10 minutes from Georgetown, five minutes from the Safeway store in the Watergate Hotel and the Kennedy Center, and best of all, across the street from the area's Metro subway terminal. We quickly learned, however, that our main mode of transportation would be an old form of locomotion, better known as walking.

Our first night in Washington, we joined a group of other interns on the top of Milton dorms for a roof party. We hit it off immediately. We learned the "ska-dance" from California, the "shag" from Alabama and North Carolina, and the Northeastern version of "rock 'n roll" and "new wave" dancing. Of course the Texans and Oklahomans brought along "two-step-pin'" and took some good-natured ribbing about our "country" accents. We seemed to spend an incredible amount of time dealing with the Oklahoma stereotype—prairie grass, cow pastures, oil wells, and, yes, Indian teepees!

A little in awe of this historic big city, we plunged right into its activities the next day, attending a free Memorial Day concert by the National Symphony on the lawn of the Capitol, joining a large, enthusiastic crowd enjoying picnics of hotdogs and fried chicken.

By 8 a.m. Tuesday, the Ewing troupe was on the Metro heading for our first

day on the job. I worked for Oklahoma's 4th District Congressman Dave McCurdy. Melissa Stendig, a senior economics major from Garland, Texas, interned with 2nd District Congressman Mike Synar. Mary Jane Coffman, a senior from Harrah majoring in letters, was assigned to the office of U.S. Sen. Don Nickles. Micheline Johnson, a senior communications major, and Gerry Cater, a political science junior, both from Norman, interned for U.S. Sen. David L. Boren.

The first day was spent orienting us to the office staff, the Library of Congress research material, the Capitol Building and the underground tunnel system connecting the Capitol and the House and Senate office buildings. Finally we got our official photo I.D. cards which would allow us use of any staff entrance. We were now "yellow badges," the term for Capitol Hill interns. Attempting to grasp the complexity of our new environment in one day was a big ordeal, but our excitement overcame our feelings of inadequacy.

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Throughout the summer, our days were filled with a wide range of activities designed to familiarize us with the operation of the federal government, both in theory and in reality. We were assigned to many of the same tasks as the regular office staff. We opened mail, answered constituent letters, covered legislative hearings, used computers, clipped newspapers, wrote press releases, and engaged in a variety of research projects. We had access to the resources of the Library of Congress, such as the Congressional Research Service, and learned firsthand the amount of research that goes into the actual drafting of a bill.

In McCurdy's office in the Cannon House Office Building, I researched the 1985 farm bills that were pending

before House subcommittees, information which the congressman then could use in his constituent newsletter. I researched the Next-Generation Weather Radar System, NEXRAD, including the role NEXRAD could play in predicting tornadoes and other severe storms. I also researched the rules and regulations for establishing a Political Action Committee.

In July, I attended a "smokeless tobacco" hearing in which Synar introduced legislation that would place warning labels on smokeless tobacco products. Rep. Samuel S. Stratton, D-N.Y., Rep. Cardiss Collins, D-Ill., and Synar all testified, along with persons from a dozen health-related agencies. I summarized the arguments, pros and cons, for a staff legislative assistant who in turn reported to McCurdy for his decision on whether to co-sponsor the legislation. I also covered a joint House/Senate hearing on the commercialization of Landsat (Land-Observing Satellite Program) which concerned the negotiation of a contract with the Earth Observation Satellite Co. (EOSAT) to operate the first commercial system. This issue was very important for Oklahoma since Norman was announced as the first Landsat site a few days later.

One of the most interesting aspects of our summer was observing firsthand how dedicated our bosses were to their jobs. One day McCurdy took his interns to lunch—OU graduate student Julie McNickles, OU senior John Primrose and me. Something he said kept coming back to me for the rest of my stay in Washington. "Don't do anything for ambition's sake alone," he told us. "Know *why* you want to do something."

In the nearby Rayburn House Office Building, Melissa Stendig was doing similar duties for Synar, researching Fair Housing laws and the ramifications of legislation concerning Alzheimers disease centers. She also attended hearings on health care for the aging and a proposed amendment to the Staggers Act of 1980, which deregulated the railroads, the latter prompting a newsletter which she wrote for railroad retirees.

Melissa spent a great deal of time in the office working on research after



Congressman Dave McCurdy poses outside the Capitol with his 1985 Ewing intern, Bartlesville senior Lynn Grigsby.



Mary Jane Coffman, a senior from Harrah, confers with her summer employer, Oklahoma's U.S. Senator Don Nickles.

hours. One such late session left her marooned in the office for the night. "When I got through with my research," she explains, "I realized that the Metro had closed for the evening. I didn't have any money to take a cab, and I didn't want to wake anyone, so I just slept there. Rep. Synar was astonished when he walked in the next morning!"

On the Nickles staff in the Hart Senate Office Building, Mary Jane Coffman's most interesting assignment was researching adoption programs in Oklahoma, specifically the adoption practices for "special-need" youngsters, such as minority, handicapped or older children. Her work coincided with hearings on adoption practices being held by the Labor and Human Resources Committee. She attended the committee meetings and also a staff meeting of legislative assistants from the offices of all the senators who serve on the committee.

"It was interesting seeing the constant changes in proposed legislation that were taking place before the Labor and Human Resource Committee meeting ever started," Mary Jane says.

The most memorable of Mary Jane's experiences was being among the crowd to greet the American hostages from the hijacked TWA flight on their return from the Middle East. "It was

a media event," she says. "The President and Nancy Reagan were there. The President spoke, and then one of the hostages spoke. It was very moving because it was so patriotic."

Boren provided a summer's education for two Ewing interns, Gerry Cater and Micheline Johnson. Gerry found his greatest satisfaction in the speaker's series which the senator holds for congressional interns. Gerry met personally with the Lebanese ambassador, His Excellency Dr. Abdullah Boulabib; Jack Valenti, the president of the Motion Picture Association; and Mrs. Mary Ellen Monroney, widow of the late Sen. Mike Monroney of Oklahoma. "Talking with these people on a one-to-one basis provided me with valuable insight," Gerry says.

Gerry also prepared a formal, in-depth research paper for Boren on the problems in U.S. relations with the Philippines. "I met with the Minister of Political Affairs, Leonides Cody, at the Philippine Embassy," Gerry says. "I also spoke with the publisher of the leading opposition newspaper, Alexander Esclamado, and the leading opposition figure in the United States, Raul Manglapus, who is in exile here."

Together with Tim Rasnic, an OU senior also interning with Boren, and with the senator's legislative assistant, Greg Kubiak, a former OU student body president, Gerry helped to

develop a proposal for a national teacher scholarship program. "We researched a concept that would attract the brightest students into the teaching field," Gerry explains. "We wrote letters to the leading educational figures in the nation for their opinions on the project." Boren has designated the project as one of his top legislative priorities and has begun to lobby many of his colleagues.

Micheline researched a reorganization proposal that would integrate the divisions of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "The structure was set up in the 1940s, and today it is ineffective," Micheline contends. "There is no integration between the services; they are really resistant to change. Consequently, the change must come from the outside." The proposal she researched for Boren was drafted by Gen. David Jones, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Boren took all his summer interns to the parade performance at the Marine Barracks. "Afterward the senator took us to eat pizza," Micheline recalls. "He was so personable. We were honored to be with him, and we realized how much he cared that we really learn something from everything we did."

Periodically all the congressional interns met together for seminars where we heard from congressmen such as



U.S. Senator David L. Boren checks scheduling for his speakers series with intern Gerry Cater, Norman junior.



Congressman Mike Synar takes time to answer a question for Melissa Stendig, senior intern from Garland, Texas.

Rep. Jack Kemp, R-N.Y.; Rep. Jim Wright, D-Texas; Rep. Bobbi Fiedler, D-Calif.; Rep. Dick Gephardt, D-Mo.; Rep. McCurdy; Rep. Dan Rostenkowski, D-Ill., the chairman of the House Ways and Means committee; and consumer advocate Ralph Nader. We were on the Hill when the Prime Minister of India, His Excellency Rajiv Gandhi, spoke to a joint session of Congress.

Boren invited the Ewing interns to his own speakers series where we met informally with Valenti, Ambassador Boulabib, and Gen. Jack Merrick, NATO representative to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. We also visited with Oliver "Buck" Ravelle, the assistant deputy director for the FBI, during Boren's recording of "Washington Watch," a cable TV show aired in Oklahoma.

Our hours and weekends were crammed with as many of the sights and experiences of the Washington area as we could possibly absorb. Being on tight budgets, congressional interns usually can sniff out receptions where free food is served in large quantities. It didn't take long to figure out that this was the *in* thing to do, not only to save money but also to meet important people, especially when the Oklahoma delegation was in attendance and could provide us with an opportunity to mingle.

Those of us who didn't play softball soon learned as we played for our congressional office teams, the Synar Senators, the McCurdy Rural Americans, and Boren to Run squads. At the annual Congressional Baseball Game, we cheered on two of our popular bosses, McCurdy and Synar, both first-stringers.

We attended church services at the National Cathedral, the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, and St. John's Episcopal Church, the "Church of the Presidents" across from the White House in Lafayette Square, attended by every chief executive since James Madison.

The Washington Monument, the Jefferson Memorial, the Lincoln Memorial and the Vietnam Memorial were all within walking distance from our dorms. We spent many evenings walking or jogging along the reflecting ponds with the illuminated White House and Capitol dome shining brightly in the background.

We toured the many museums of the Smithsonian Institution—the National Gallery of Art, the National Museum of Natural History, the National Botanic Gardens, the National Zoo—the White House, Library of Congress, Capitol Building, and heard three opinions read in the Supreme Court.

We stood beside President John F.

Kennedy's grave in Arlington National Cemetery, visited Gen. Robert E. Lee's mansion and witnessed the "Changing of the Guards" ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

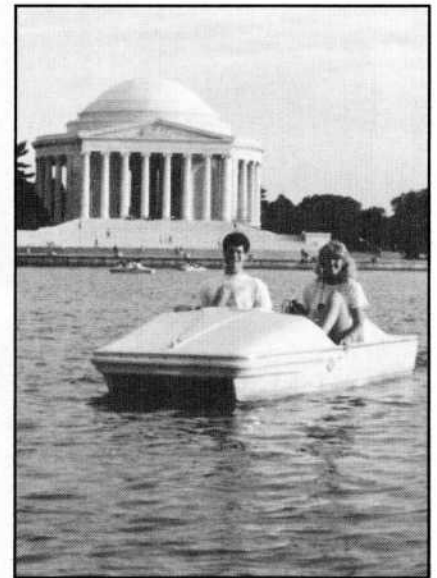
Eight members of the intern corps rode bikes 40 miles round trip to Mount Vernon, George Washington's plantation and home. Another group toured the U.S. Naval Academy and the Maryland Statehouse in Annapolis. Later we visited the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, founded by Thomas Jefferson, and his home, Monticello, and still later, Yorktown and Williamsburg. One weekend we were even more adventurous and took the Amtrak to New York City for as much sightseeing as two days would allow.

Of course for sheer spectacle, nothing compared to the Fourth of July. With 750,000 of our closest friends, we camped out for 16 hours on the Capitol mall listening to the Oak Ridge Boys, Katrina and the Waves and the Beach Boys by day, and by night watching the most spectacular fireworks display we had ever seen. There are no words to describe how patriotic it felt to be in Washington, D.C., on that historic day.

It is impossible to work in the nation's capital, even for a brief 10 weeks, without gaining a reverence for the past. For the Ewing interns, there



Collegiate interns from throughout the country camp out on the Capitol Mall for 16 hours with 750,000 July 4th celebrants, listening to the Beach Boys, Oak Ridge Boys and Katrina and the Waves, waiting for the fireworks to begin.



Lynn Grigsby and North Carolina intern Fred Jones take a paddle boat ride on Potomac by the Jefferson Memorial.



Ewing Foundation Chairman Marcus Cohn, left, and Capitol Hill veteran Charles Ward, in back, pause on the Capitol steps with four of the 1985 Ewing interns, from left, Gerry Cater, Melissa Stendig, Micheline Johnson and Lynn Grigsby. A Washington attorney, Cohn was the guiding spirit behind the organization of the Ewing program, while Ward remains one of its staunchest supporters.

were many reminders that our summer experience was possible only because of a University of Oklahoma professor who died before any of us were born. Cortez A. M. Ewing had made such a lasting contribution to the lives of his students that they wanted to "carry on the Ewing tradition forever."

Many years ago, the late John Fischer paid tribute to his former professor in *Harper's Magazine*: "He never schemed to become a college president, or even a dean. He shunned the outside consulting jobs and government assignments which offer the traditional academic route to money and fame. Although he did more than his share of research and publication . . . he saw it as part of the job of a good teacher. His only discernible ambition was shockingly unfashionable: he liked to teach. And odder yet, he liked students."

The organizers of the Ewing Foundation, led by Washington attorney Marcus Cohn, who serves as its chairman, wanted a living memorial to the professor and eventually took the suggestion of OU student Brent Clark, now an Oklahoma City attorney, that an internship program be established. From the first discussions nearly 25 years ago, Ewing's widow, Ina, had only one request: if a woman student was qualified, she should have the same right to be selected as the men.

Cohn hopes for similar qualities in



The National Zoological Park of the Smithsonian Institution was one stop in the congressional interns' effort to see everything Washington, D.C., and the surrounding area has to offer during their summer in the national capital.

all Ewing recipients. "The student should be willing to be exposed to new ideas," he says, "not to reject new ideas because they are new, but to think about them. And they should question things, since one of Ewing's greatest attributes was to question, which he felt, in turn, forced one to think."

He would like the Ewing fellows to return to the campus with "a basic respect for and understanding of the importance of conflicting ideas in a democratic society—and to be able to tolerate these differences. It is important to have a clear respect for the political process, how it works, and most of all, to understand that it *does* work, with great nobility."

From the beginning many members of the Oklahoma congressional delegation have given staunch backing to the Ewing program. Former House Speaker Carl Albert and the late Rep. Tom Steed were early supporters. Sens. Boren and Nickles, and Reps. McCurdy, Synar, James R. Jones, Wes Watkins, Glenn English and Mickey Edwards all have sponsored Ewing interns in their offices.

Boren's veteran administrative assistant, Charles Ward, was serving in that capacity for Carl Albert when the Ewing program was established and helped work out the financing. "This is what Ewing would have wanted," he says. "It is a unique way to remember him."

"The Ewing program exposes the intern to the day-to-day operations of government and allows them to see congressional members as real people—human beings," McCurdy says. "Upon leaving Washington, D.C., the intern is wiser and has a broader appreciation for people, issues and the dynamics involved."

Boren is committed to having at least one and sometimes two Ewing interns each summer and rates them the best people he has had working for him and a source of future staff members. He also sees the Ewing program as an opportunity to repay former Speaker of the House of Representatives Sam Rayburn, who spent a great amount of individual time with him in his younger days.

"When there is an interested public official who helps to mold you," he explains, "you have a debt to repay. I've always felt young people should have dual ambitions—to reach goals and achieve success and then, as importantly, to give back. You get more satisfaction in giving than in achieving."

We found that several of the former Ewing interns had returned to Capitol Hill after graduation from OU to pursue public sector careers. Pete Glavas interned with Boren in 1979 and is now his chief of staff and tax legislative assistant. Judy Gorman Prinkey was a 1979 intern for Edwards and is presently employed by Nickles as as-

sistant press secretary. Cody Graves, Steed's last Ewing intern in 1980, returned to Washington as Boren's energy, environment and small business legislative assistant and is a freshman law student at Georgetown University this fall.

"The internship presented a clear understanding of the legislative process," Graves says, "and an appreciation for the long hours and hard work. It gave me a desire to pursue a career in public service. The Ewing gets you in the door."

There are other Ewing alumni in Washington; three who are now practicing attorneys invited us, the 1985 crop, to lunch—Skip Stephens, one of the first Ewings in 1971; Beth Hutchins Emery, 1973; and Lisa Hemmer, 1976. They were eager to exchange experiences and reflections on our summers, as were the guests at the swimming party which Marcus Cohn and his wife, Honey, hosted for us near the end of the summer.

All too soon, the Washington adventure was coming to an end. On August

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1, the night Congress recessed for the remainder of the summer, I sat with some other interns in the House Gallery listening to debate on the budget. In three weeks we would be back on the campus. The excitement of working in such proximity with our nation's leaders, the friends we had made, the understanding we had gained would be only memories—but memories that would remain etched in our lives for all time. □

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: A senior public relations major from Bartlesville, Lynn Grigsby is a three-term member of OU Student Congress, active in a variety of President's Leadership Class alumni committees, recipient of several merit scholarships, and has been named to numerous honorary scholastic and leadership organizations. She is the first OU Homecoming Queen to be chosen by popular vote.