



My name is Anu Ambikaipalan and I spent the summer of 2007 in wintry Washington D.C., walking amongst the halls of the U.S. Congress. I was one of 12 Australian university students who were selected to participate in the Uni-Capitol Washington Internship Program (UCWIP) founded by Eric K. Federling.

UCWIP is a program focused on giving Australian university students an educational and professional insight into the legislative body of the most powerful country in the world. I spent my 8 weeks in Congress interning in the office of Representative Alcee L Hastings, Democrat for the 23rd District of Florida. When I arrived my office was understaffed, and even though I was an intern, I became an integral member of 'Team Hastings'. In addition to answering telephone calls from constituents (always an interesting

experience!) and replying to constituent mail, I spent the majority of my time researching and developing legislation for the Congressman to introduce into Congress to combat gang violence in Florida.

With no real knowledge or understanding of the extent of the gang violence problem in America, I took every opportunity to research the issue; from reading newspapers, to attending briefings and documentary premieres on the issue. A highlight of mine was attending a briefing run by comedian Bill Cosby on combating youth violence. I also visited a juvenile detention centre and spoke to youths that were gang members which was a real eye-opener and emphasised the extent of the problem.

As I was working in a relatively small office I had plenty of contact with the Congressman. He took a special interest in ensuring my time in Washington D.C was exciting, memorable and educational. For instance, he invited myself and two of the other interns to discuss the War on Terror with him and allowed us to express our opinions both in person and then on paper. The Congressman later commented that he thoroughly enjoyed reading my paper and would use some of it in a presentation he would be giving to the Intelligence Committee of which he was a member.

UCWIP also gives students a cultural insight into the history of USA and its political roots. Eric organised a trip to Philadelphia for us to see the Liberty Bell and the rooms where America's founding fathers had once debated the Bill of Rights. We also visited the National Constitution Centre and were given a guided tour of the battle fields of Gettysburg.

On top of experiencing the historical aspects of USA, we were lucky enough to be part of history-making moments such as attending the exclusive inauguration ball of the new Mayor of Washington D.C, Adrian Fenty and the Roe v Wade, Pro- Women's Choice dinner. Another such experience was being present at the swearing-in of the new Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi. As the first woman to ever hold that position, I knew that being present at her swearing-in would be one of the most historical moments in America's political history – and I was there to witness it.

Every intern's trip will include opportunities and events that are unimaginable and definitely difficult to put down in words. A visit to the State Department, Australian Embassy and Georgetown University were also on the cards as some of the amazing opportunities that we were given, rounding off the whole UCWIP experience.

UCWIP is a unique opportunity for a university student to really find themselves and experience something that is beyond the imagination. Through this experience I discovered my passion for international relations, met some of the most amazing, intelligent and outstanding individuals and travelled to places such as New York, Boston and Florida. Every intern's experience will be varied but I can assure you that every experience is thoroughly rewarding.

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