



Yale College
Center for International & Professional Experience

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Serving the People of Hawai'i

This summer, I had the incredible privilege of serving as an intern for Senator Brian Schatz of Hawai'i. Although I had initially planned to spend the summer in Washington, D.C., I was offered a spot in the Honolulu office to focus on constituent services, public engagement, and community outreach. Since this work was in line with the goals that I outlined in my fellowship proposal – specifically, giving back to the people of Hawai'i, learning about the functions of the federal government, and engaging with issues on a community level – I enthusiastically accepted the position and set out to discover what a career in public service entails.

Most of my day-to-day work involved carrying out the basic functions of an official office. Each week, I opened dozens of letters, talked to hundreds of constituents on the phone, drafted messages on behalf of the Senator, and organized troves of data relating to ongoing issues in Hawai'i. For instance, I combed through the names of thousands of people who had written to show their support for the expansion of the marine monument Papahānaumokuākea, read about individuals' struggles with veterans affairs, obtaining a visa, and social security, spoke with constituents who called the office to voice their concerns about the ongoing threats of terrorism and gun violence, and wrote messages for events such as the annual Prince Lot Hula Festival and for groups such as the Korean War Veterans Association. These seemingly mundane tasks came to be some of the most rewarding of my 10-week internship. By reading a myriad of letters, writing countless messages, and speaking with a multitude of people, I was able to learn which issues were most affecting the people of Hawai'i and what specific actions our office could take to improve the lives of those living in the state.

In addition, I worked on projects that had a lasting impact on the community. For example, I spent much of my internship working with the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) and local nonprofit organizations to devise a way to expand AmeriCorps VISTA, a national anti-poverty program, in the state of Hawai'i. By identifying potential VISTA sponsors and proposing a virtual CNCS-Hawai'i forum that would be coordinated by our office, I was able to define a strategy for recruiting potential sponsors across all the major islands, thereby paving the way for AmeriCorps VISTA's expansion in the state. Furthermore, during my time with Senator Schatz, I put together a comprehensive summary of Senate rules and regulations that the office utilized as a guiding resource for future community outreach-related projects. These projects gave me invaluable experience with outreach, research, and memo writing, and also allowed me to pursue my goal of learning about the functions of government and giving back to my local community.

I learned more from my summer work than I ever could have imagined. Drafting messages on behalf of the Senator allowed me to familiarize myself with the organizations and populations that make up Hawai'i's unique cultural landscape, while speaking with individuals one-on-one and reading their correspondence gave me extensive insight into the specific challenges that the people of Hawai'i face. One of the things that I appreciate most about my summer experience was the personal scale on which I was able to work. In the Honolulu office, I was able to see the positive impact that public servants can have on an individual level. Whether it was helping a constituent to obtain a visa for an ill family member or to access critical government services such as social security, I observed the good that government can do for people, as well as many of

government's limitations. This experience, then, not only allowed me to develop my writing, organizational, and communication skills, but it also gave me the opportunity to explore the nature of public service.

Most importantly, having the opportunity to work for Senator Schatz cemented my long-term interest in the public sector. While I had volunteered in the past with multiple non-profit organizations such as Kalikolehua, the Yale Hunger and Homelessness Action Project (YHHAP), and Volunteers Around the World in the past, this was my first experience working in an official capacity and seeing how good governance can positively impact a community. My time in Hawai'i inspired me to continue to seek out other public service-related opportunities. In fact, I am taking a leave of absence from Yale this semester to intern at the White House where I will be doing more community-based work with the President's Commission on White House Fellowships. In the future, I hope to follow up these experience with a legislative internship and to use this knowledge about public service to solve issues of importance to both Hawai'i and the United States.

In closing, I want to express my gratitude to the Class of 1960 John Heinz Government Service Fellowship for making my summer goals a reality. Without the support of the selection committee, the donors, and this fellowship, I wouldn't have been able to devote a whole summer to tackling the issues that I'm passionate about and serving the people of Hawai'i. I plan to continue to pursue a career in public service, and I look forward to using the skills that I learned this summer to further help my home state. I extend my sincerest thanks to all those who invested in me, and I vow to continue the work I began this summer by staying engaged and continuing to advocate for underprivileged and underserved communities.