



Patrick Sellers

Working for the Minority

For political scientist Patrick Sellers, whose scholarship has focused on congressional campaigns, changing his professional focus to working in a Senate office came naturally. A self-proclaimed “political hack” and a 1996–97 APSA Congressional Fellow, Sellers has settled into his office in the Capitol building working for Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-SD). His responsibilities at Indiana University in Bloomington have been temporarily traded in to work on campaign finance reform, judiciary matters, and his main charge of helping the Senate Minority frame its budget message and pitch it to the media, a process he describes as a sometimes “awkward ballet” among his office, the Senate Majority, and the president.

Sellers is a 1994 Ph.D. from Duke University whose major research focus has been on how congressional candidates enhance their credibility among the media and voters by emphasizing issues on which they have built a favorable record of accomplishment. By examining campaign themes of various candidates and comparing them with the backgrounds of the candidates, Sellers has shown why some campaign messages are successful and others fail.

“I applied for a Congressional Fellowship because I wanted to look at the different aspects of American government, and the legislative arena is very different from the electoral arena,” Sellers reported. But as he began to focus on the legislative side of politics, Sellers was surprised by similarities with the electoral side. “As in campaigning, developing a message is a very important part of the legislative process,” Sellers said. “What has impressed me most is how heavily the congressional leadership relies on message development. My background studying message development in campaigns has helped the leadership think about it in the legislative context.”

Sellers sees his experience in the Congressional Fellowship Program as an opportunity to expand his research, though, he remains in the “soaking and poking” stage. “I can see my research expanding from work on elections to work on the legislative process. Right now I’m trying to follow the rationale behind the decisions that are made and comparing what happens in strategy meetings to what happens in the media, she said.”

This is not Sellers’ first stint on Capitol Hill. After graduating from Davidson College in North Carolina, Sellers spent nearly two years working

in the office of Representative James McClure Clarke (D-NC) who left the House in 1991. Sellers says his experience in Clarke’s office helped frame his work as a political scientist.

“Clarke was in what was the most competitive district in the country during the 1980s. From 1982 until 1990, no candidate won election in that district by more than 1%, so working for Clarke gave me my first good taste of elections, and then I went on to study them.”

Though he has enjoyed his time on the Hill, Sellers has no interest in making a run for electoral office. When he returns to Indiana in the fall, Sellers will keep in contact with Capitol Hill by acting as an academic advisor to Indiana undergraduates who serve as interns in Washington.

German Marshall Fund Expands Grant to Congressional Fellows

The German Marshall Fund of the United States has for 15 years provided funding for German academics to serve as APSA Congressional Fellows. Until now, German Fellows were not consistently funded to participate for the full ten-months of the fellowship program. But in February, the German Marshall Fund agreed to extend the grant for German Fellows to spend the full fellowship year on Capitol Hill, beginning with this year’s Fellows.

During the 1996–97 fellowship year, Kirsten Gerstner and Thomas Zittel are the German academics participating as APSA Congressional Fellows. Gerstner recently received her master’s degree in political science from the Free University of Berlin and works on human rights issues in the office of Representative Jim McDermott (D-WA). Zittel teaches political science at the University of Mannheim and took his masters degree from Johns Hopkins University in 1990 and his doctoral degree at the University of Mannheim in 1995. He has served his fellowship in the office of Representative Michael Oxley (R-OH) focusing on the issues of environment and technology.

In addition to funding APSA Con-