CONGRESSIONAL FELLOWSHIP

Reflections on My APSA Congressional Fellowship

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Passing my oral PhD examinations at the University of Chicago left me free to apply for and receive the American Political Science Association Congressional Fellowship that I had first heard about from my undergraduate political science professor, Roy Morey, who had been a Fellow. Departing from the political science text during his lectures, Morey would say this is how politics really works from the inside. I wanted that on-the-ground experience.

Having completed my coursework, I arrived in Washington, DC, in the fall of 1972 anxious to finish writing my dissertation and excited to work on "The Hill." My wife, Loretta, got a job as an education consultant at one of the "infamous" K Street lobby firms and I joined the other Fellows in being briefed by the Fellowship director, Thomas Mann, and reading accounts of past Fellows. According to these confidential files, two of the best offices to work in on the Senate side were Senator Lee Metcalf's office and Senator Hubert Humphrey's office. I knew little to nothing about Metcalf but, of course, Humphrey was internationally known. I chose to apply for a position with Humphrey along with several other Fellows.

On the ninth anniversary of John Kennedy's assassination, I had a meeting with his chief opponent for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1960, Hubert Humphrey. Humphrey had served as vice president under Lyndon Johnson and had just returned to the Senate after losing one of the closest presidential elections in history to Richard Nixon in 1968. After a few years out of political office, Humphrey had returned to Washington as the junior senator from Minnesota (Walter Mondale was the senior senator). He conducted the interviews for two Fellows positions on his staff.

Even though Humphrey was a civil rights hero to liberal Democrats based on a famous human rights speech he gave at the 1948 Democratic National Convention and his steadfast support for civil rights as mayor of Minneapolis and in Congress. I, however, had disagreed with his support for the war in Vietnam. Although Humphrey, himself, had some doubts about United States involvement, he went along with Johnson to gain his support for the presidential race in 1968. Given Humphrey's support, I voted for the Peace and Freedom party candidate for president, comedian/activist Dick Gregory.

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I got one of the two positions in Humphrey's office after his first choice, British journalist William Shawcross, turned down the offer to work for Senator Ted Kennedy. Later I discovered that Shawcross was placed in an annex office and seldom saw Kennedy, while I was seated with Humphrey's legislative assistants and saw him nearly every day. I was quickly given responsibility for the reintroduction of ten bills in January. This included responsibility on legislation in the Public Works and Commerce committee's especially the Highway Trust Fund and Congressional Reform. Humphrey's first speech in the Senate many years earlier was an attack on the Committee on Non-Essential Expenditures as being non-essential. He was roundly condemned for his impudence by members of both parties. My work also included advising on co-sponsoring bills and writing statements for the co-sponsorships and overseeing Humphrey's many interns—I had my own intern! I told our administrative assistant that I was a little nervous advising the Senator on which bills to support given my lack of experience. He said not to worry because Humphrey would know if the advice was wrong—this was not the case for many senators. Humphrey had a deep knowledge on topics as varied as nuclear disarmament, agriculture, and civil rights. He also knew personally the leaders of the Soviet Union, all the major farm groups, and the leaders of the major civil rights organizations.

While he was only the junior senator from Minnesota, Humphrey was considered a national senator. That is, his constituency was nationwide, not just statewide. He sent out roughly 300 to 400 letters a week and was always on the phone. I answered many of the letters sent to the senator that required more than an automatic response (robo letters). The responses ranged from bank presidents and airline executives to average citizens with complex questions. You never knew who might drop by the office. John Glenn, Hollywood actors, and Minnesota constituents were among the visitors. Those that did not get a meeting with the senator were often directed to me or another legislative assistant. Some were pleased to get a hearing while others were upset they couldn't talk to the senator. I also had to handle phone calls to the office about a wide variety of topics. Of course, many wanted to talk with Humphrey but had to settle for me. Some wanted to lecture me, and some had simple questions like why was a pound of chicken 39 cents last week and 59 cents this week?

One of my favorite duties was accompanying Humphrey when he gave speeches to the many student groups visiting the Capitol. He and Muriel (his wife) had decided that that would be one of his chief activities during this phase of his career. He

enjoyed this engagement with young people, and I often had to pull him away to take him to his next meeting. Usually, they wanted to take pictures and get his autograph and he would always oblige. Sometimes I would be sent ahead to entertain an audience while they waited for the senator to arrive. Here is my diary entry for February 15, 1973:

> Had a surprise meeting with some high school students from Minnesota. I held them until both Humphrey and Mondale showed up. They had already talked with Representative aides and the Pentagon. The Pentagon aide said he didn't know the defense budget figures when they asked him. Humphrey talked and Mondale listened to him for over half-an-hour. Humphrey waxed eloquent over cuts in poverty programs while aid went to Vietnam. The president had broken the law like the draft dodgers he condemns. He had the students crying and got choked up himself....

Humphrey worked seven days a week and expected his staff to be on call or in the office when he needed them. He had remarkable energy for a man his age or any age.

Former president Harry Truman died in December 1992. Humphrey was asked to give one of the eulogies at his funeral. Apparently he and Truman were good friends because the family gave Humphrey one of Truman's walking canes after the funeral. A month later, Lyndon Johnson died. Of course, Humphrey knew Johnson well and did media interviews all day. Humphrey took Marty, the other Congressional Fellow, and me up to the family gallery in the Senate to watch the eulogies being presented on the Senate floor. I was able to bring my brother, Oren, and Loretta with me. Later we watched the Johnson funeral procession enter the Capitol on a bright, cold January day.

A highlight for me were meetings with the other Congressional Fellows at lunch, receptions or frequently at talks by politicians, political scientists, and journalists to our group. I got Humphrey to speak and naturally he was well-received. A few Fellows met to consider writing a book about our experience. The problem was that our insider knowledge was what we had to offer but we agreed anything too revealing would destroy our bosses trust in the fellowship program. The idea was abandoned. One former Fellow I had lunch with was my old undergraduate professor, Roy Morey. He was now working in the Nixon administration and said there might be a place in the Republican administration for me when the fellowship was over if I was interested. Morey went on to a distinguished career as a senior officer in the United Nations Development Programme.

Perhaps the biggest highlight for me would be late evenings when Humphrey could relax and tell stories about his many experiences. He was always in a good mood when he returned from foreign travel where he was welcomed by world leaders. One of my favorite antidotes involved the time he stayed at Windsor palace in the private residence. He said tricycles and toys were strewn all over the place and Princess Anne had asked him to convince her mother, the Queen, to let Anne attend a co-ed school. Another highlight was a trip with Humphrey on a Bell Labs jet to their New Jersey laboratories. We were escorted the whole time by two of their lobbyists and shown some of the latest technology. I'm not sure either Humphrey or I fully comprehended the presentations, but it was an interesting experience. One thing I noticed as we traveled was his frequent trips to the restroom, unfortunately often followed by people who recognized him. He was in the early stages of bladder problems that would claim his life a few years later.

One day at a staff meeting in early January, Humphrey asked me what I thought of his idea on a resolution declaring Congress should share responsibility with the President regarding war powers. The idea came from his experience with Vietnam. I told him I didn't have an answer, and he said think about it. We had come full circle.

On April 23, 1973, I went to work with the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). They were happy to add a Congressional Fellow to a very small staff. Although the Caucus had been formed in 1970, it was still in the process of finding space and figuring out its institutional role. The executive director was Augustus (Gus) Adair, a Black political scientist from Morgan State College in Baltimore. Gus had been Representative Parren Mitchell's campaign manager, and I imagine the CBC job was his reward. Gus was funny, direct, and seemed to know everyone in the Black political universe. There were a few additional staff and a secretary. It would be a month before we moved into permanent space at the old Congressional Hotel.

Communication between the CBC staff and members' staff was poor. An early example occurred when Gus sent out a memo urging members to vote against an extension on the Western front of the Capitol as too expensive at a time when poverty programs were being cut. Members appreciated Gus's initiative since his predecessor apparently spent a great deal of time collecting speaker's honorariums. Unfortunately, Gus had not cleared the statement with CBC Chair, Louis Stokes (D-OH) of Cleveland. A successful lawsuit by my cousin, Charles Lucas, had created the 21st Congressional District represented by Stokes. My cousin had run for the seat but was a Republican in a Democratic city. Andrew Young and Barbara Jordan had followed Gus's advice but were surprised when the rest of the Caucus voted for the extension. They were not aware of a deal reached a year earlier in which Ron Dellums (D-CA) received a seat on the Armed Services Committee in exchange for CBC support of the extension. Stokes voiced his displeasure with Gus.

Unfortunately, Gus and the rest of us spent a lot of time on low level chores. The office lacked basic reference material like the *National Journal* and *Congressional Quarterly*. We had to fight to gain the use of the Congressional Research Service which member offices routinely had. A lot of paperwork was involved in getting a few dollars for anything from donuts to printing. It was a struggle to get Congressional identity badges and CBC staff could not attend Caucus meetings. Clearly, the members would have to get used to an active staff but first they needed to figure out their own role.

Part of the reason for the disorganization in staffing the CBC rests with the Ford Foundation or, more precisely, competition for Ford Foundation funding from the Joint Center for Political Studies (JCPS). Both the Caucus and JCPS applied for Ford funding at the same time. When Ford indicated it would fund only one of the applicants, the CBC withdrew its application with the understanding that JCPS would become the legislative arm of the Caucus. Under the leadership of Frank Reeves and later Eddie Williams (a former Congressional Fellow), however, the Joint Center became completely independent of the CBC. This con-

flict created poor relations between Reeves and the Caucus as the latter scrambled to staff its office.

Under its founding chair, Representative Charles Diggs (D-Mi), the CBC filled a historic gap in directing attention to United States foreign policy toward Africa. As chair of both the Caucus and the House Subcommittee on Africa, Diggs was in a perfect position to question US support for the undemocratic and racist regimes in Southern Africa. When the United States had refused to send official observers to the 1955 Bandung Conference of "third world" leaders, Representative Adam Clayton Powell had attended as a private citizen. He questioned the wisdom of any country ignoring a meeting representing more than sixty percent of the world's population. Since the formation of the CBC in 1970, Black representatives were very active in African related conferences including the African-American Dialogue and the African-American Representatives Conference. Diggs, along with John Conyers (D-MI), Charles Rangel (D-NY), and Stokes attended the latter conference in Lusaka, Zambia.

While the CBC would continue to play an important role in influencing US policy toward Africa, foreign policy was not a priority for the constituents of most CBC members. Police brutality, on the other hand, was an issue that was hard for members to ignore, especially when local authorities were unresponsive or complicit. This was the case on December 4, 1969, when a special unit of the Chicago police working with the FBI and district attorney raided the apartment of Black Panther leader Fred Hampton killing him as he slept in bed along with fellow Panther leader Mark Clark and four others who were in the apartment. While the police claimed the Panthers fired first the evidence proved otherwise. The Panthers conducted tours of the murder scene and thousands, including Loretta and I, visited the site. Visitors also included five Representatives—Stokes, Diggs, Powell, Conyers, and William Clay (D-Mo). These five members, joined by Panther leaders Bobby Rush and David Hillard held a nearly six-hour public hearing on Chicago's Westside to hear community concerns over the shootings. Representatives Shirley Chisholm (D-NY) and Augustus Hawkins (D-CA) also declared their support for the Panther version of the incident. More than a decade of legal wrangling and investigations would ultimately result in a nearly $2 million settlement with the estates of Hampton, Clark, and Panther survivors of the incident. It would also mark the beginning of the end of the Daley machine.

In December 1969, the Black members of Congress had formed the Democratic Select Committee, the predecessor to the CBC, which would follow shortly. Thus, the first role of the CBC might be said to investigate police misconduct. Police oversight, however, was not a role most members were comfortable with. In late April 1972, a representative of Bobby Seale called Gus in an effort to set up an emergency national meeting in Oakland. The focus of the meeting was to discuss "issues" in the presidential election, but Jesse Jackson was the only national figure to respond favorably.

It was not the Panther hearings but rather a meeting with Richard Nixon that brought the Caucus its first national attention. From almost the beginning, the 13 members of Congress that composed the CBC sought an audience with President Nixon. Seeing themselves as the voice of 25 million African Americans they believed the issues that concerned Blacks, and the poor were not partisan issues. It was not, however, until they threatened to boycott Nixon's 1971 State of the Union address that the White House consented to a meeting. On March 25, 1971, the CBC presented 61 recommendations to Nixon covering a wide range of topics. While the overdue response from the White House was largely a declaration of the progress made under Nixon, the Caucus had gained the public's attention. In subsequent years the Caucus would produce its own Black State of the Union message.

The need for a staff to refute Nixon administration assertions made the need for CBC staff obvious. Consequently, its first fund-raising dinner in June 1971 provided resources for the hiring of seven staff including Howard Robinson, a former State Department professional, as executive director. From July 1971 to September 1972, the CBC conducted several conferences and three hearings. While this type of activity provided the Caucus with symbolic visibility, it produced little in terms of legislation. In fact, Gus and our legal counsel, Mitch Dasher, told me that members had little experience or expertise in drafting, introducing, and passing legislation. Moreover, Gus mentioned meetings with administration officials Roy Ash and Fred North concerning civil rights enforcement in which members were poorly prepared. They were no better prepared for a meeting with Democratic leader Bob Strauss on committee appointments. The end of symbolic politics came with the National Black Political Assembly (NBPA) conference in March 1972, which I had attended. At Gary, the competing demands of Black nationalists, civil rights leaders, and Black elected officials proved too diverse to be captured in a single Black Agenda. By breaking with the Gary Declaration, the CBC was signaling its move from symbolic to substantive politics.

While I think the shift toward policy was overdue, it is easier to gain agreement on symbolic politics than substantive issues. On the funding of community action programs (CAP), for example, members were split. Some supported this funding for local community action agencies while others saw this as funding potential political rivals. Organizations like the Urban League offered to work with the CBC on issues of mutual interest and I attended one of their national conferences while on the staff. The effort to hold legislative workshops before the annual CBC dinner was aimed at building issue alliances and educating the public. Gus gave me the responsibility for coordinating the first legislative workshop. The highlight for me was putting together a presentation by Hubert Humphrey and Augustus Hawkins on their full employment bill. It gave me a chance to reconnect with friends in Humphrey's office and the bill became a Caucus priority that eventually passed after Humphrey's death as the Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act of 1978. ■