

AAEM/RSA's Congressional Elective

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Arriving in this country as an immigrant physician and negotiating its convoluted visa and immigration policies has made me acutely aware of the impact legislation

passed in Congress has on my everyday life. Since matching into pediatric residency in 2010, I've become particularly interested in how health care policy is drafted and enacted into law in America, and now that I'm about to embark on a career caring for children on a daily basis as an attending physician, I feel that understanding how health care legislation impacts this vulnerable group is vitally important. The last three years as a fellow in pediatric emergency medicine have allowed me more time to explore this topic, but it cannot compare to the insight and experience my Congressional elective month in Washington D.C has provided.

During my second year in fellowship, I applied for the American Academy of Emergency Medicine's (AAEM) unique opportunity to conduct a Congressional elective with Congressman Raul Ruiz, MD, also an emergency physician. I was approved within 2 months of my application, and 8 months in advance of my desired start date of May 2017.

Living on the Hill and working amongst legislative staffers was both an extremely novel and surprisingly familiar experience. An emergency room could be described as "controlled chaos" — not unlike the urgent pace of information gathering and team dynamics within the Congressional office. My immediate supervisor was the Congressman's legislative director. She gave me the freedom required to craft the elective and day-to-day activities to meet my individualized goals. I was provided a working space within the office with the rest of the team, and was asked for input on health care topics related to upcoming debates or bills. I helped the office conduct research into current issues like telehealth and treatment consent. I was even able to sit with the Congressman and meet with his constituents as they discussed health care issues and other matters that concerned them.

Congressional hearings were one of my favorite events to attend during my elective. They offered a rare glimpse into the vetting and testing of proposed bills, legislation up for renewal, budget allocation, and testimonials from noteworthy individuals. I attended numerous lunch briefings hosted by organizations like the Health Care Leadership Council, National Coalition for Maternal Mental Health and the American Society for Microbiology. These lobbying groups offered views to current health care problems that were vying for Congressional action. Topics raised included

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shortages in the health care workforce, transplant list wait times, lead level monitoring, and vaccine dropout rates. Other activities that I partook in were attending news conferences and federally funded exhibitions on health technology that included key speakers from the National Institute of Health.

I also managed to observe bills being debated and voted by lawmakers on the Senate and House floors from the respective galleries, participated in medical history forums at the Library of Congress, and attended a lecture at the Supreme Court to gain a better understanding of the nation's justice system.

Overall, the AAEM/RSA Congressional elective rotation was very inspiring to me as an emergency medicine trainee. With the nation's health care system in flux, Dr. Ruiz has his hand on the pulse of health care policy. Learning more about this complicated field from him and his diligent staff has provided me with an in-depth knowledge of health care legislation and policy making that I hope to use for the betterment of the children I will serve. ■

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