

CAPITOL NOTES

NOTES FROM AN AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION FELLOW IN GOVERNMENT, PLACED IN A CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE IN 2008 TO PROMOTE PUBLIC HEALTH.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2009

Not the end of the story

Update: New senators sworn in and waiting for office room assignments, hiring staff, passing the recovery and reinvestment act, passing children's health insurance, and orienting new fellows to the Hill. Exciting inaugural events and energy. Economy, housing, credit continue its downward spiral, hope seeking eternal.

And I accepted a job! Legislative Assistant with Senator Tom Udall (New Mexico). My portfolio of issues as the new Health/Education/Labor LA includes:

- Adoption & Foster Care
- Aging/Senior Issues
- Arts and Humanities
- Disability Issues
- Education (Ed Funding, Higher Ed, Indian Education, Libraries, NLCB, Student Loans)
- Health & Healthcare (FDA, Medical Marijuana, Prescription Drugs, Prevention & Wellness, Tobacco, Global Health)
- Indian Health Services
- Labor (Unemployment/Minimum Wage)
- Medicare/Medicaid
- Social Security
- Welfare (TANF, Welfare Reform, WIC/Food Stamps)
- o Labor/HHS/Ed. Approps

And that's the rest of the story.

POSTED BY FERN GOODHART AT 4:06 PM 0 COMMENTS

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2008

A Year To Remember

President-elect Obama completes his major cabinet picks, POTUS Bush agrees to tap TARP funds for a short save of the auto industry, NPR spends two days talking about outgoing Senators signing their



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ABOUT ME

FERN GOODHART
WASHINGTON, D.C., UNITED STATES

Selected for APHA's first public health fellowship in government, join me as I reflect on my observations of this experience with Congress this year. This is my first blog, so thanks for your patience. I've worked in public health education for 32 years, with experience in teaching, research, volunteering and serving my local community with appointed and elected office.

[VIEW MY COMPLETE PROFILE](#)

desks, and I'm spending my last day of 2008 as the APHA health fellow. With approval to extend the fellowship, I'll be spending another month or two here until I find a job (or run out of money).

And wow, did this year amaze! Who ever would have expected a year ago what the planet, the world, the nation, and Congress would have experienced! We're still reeling. Wars, recession, bailouts, weather events, campaign events and outcomes, and more.

I'm very encouraged by talk of making progress on health (care) reform next year, and we all need to be contacting our Congress members to remind them to include public health and prevention.

According to the National Journal, energy, health and service were the hot topics for Congress in 2008. This was calculated by Sunlight Foundation's Capitol Words, a site that converts members' statements in the Congressional Record into data. In the past year, the word "energy" was either spoken on the House and Senate floor or inserted into the record's extended remarks over 50,000 times. "Health" came in second place at 41,000; "service" was third with 37,287. I'm encouraged!

Some key resources for health legislation recommendations include:

- Senator Baucus's paper ["Call to Action: Health Reform 2009" - <http://finance.senate.gov/healthreform2009/home.html>],
- Trust for America's Health reports on modernizing health care and on prevention [<http://healthyamericans.org/>], and
- Partnership for Prevention reports on health care reform recommendations [<http://www.prevent.org/content/view/197/>].

And my fellowship by the numbers:

- 120 Constituent meetings
- 20 Briefings attended, prepared senator for 3 hearings
- 5 Public Health Bills (SDAWS, La CURA, Helping HANDS for Autism, HIA, PHCCA), working on a 6th
- 4 Floor speeches (food safety, ROI, public health and climate change, HIA/PHCCA)
- 29 Cosigned/cosponsored bills or letters managed
- 3 Letters drafted to federal agencies (Leavitt, FDA, SAMSHA)
- 10 district talking points appearances and 10 One-pagers on bills or issues
- 1 afternoon on the floor of the Senate and sending my mom that page in the Congressional Record (where my boss asked for unanimous consent for me)
- 1 Proclamation drafted and approved
- 6 receptions

- 9 state or national Presentations about the fellowship, and 2 awards
- 1 staff holiday party
- 2 unanticipated highlights: NJ no longer being the most politically corrupt state and making the Senate Softball all-star team
- 2 private tours - the Archives and the Capitol Visitors Center, and
- many new friends and colleagues.

The office AAAS Fellow was just hired by a Congressman, so he'll be working for the House (congrats, John!), and I'm still sending out resumes. Yesterday I went down to room 40 in the Dirksen basement, where the newly elected senators have temporary offices (you saw the delivery of new office equipment - copy machines, desks and computers) all during the week. I hand-delivered 3 cv's addressed to the recently announced chiefs of staff (for New Hampshire - Shaheen, my first choice, I think; for North Carolina - Hagan; and for Virginia - Warner).

I recently found on the Senate intranet, Webster, a link (ProQuest) to the full versions of every journal published!! What an amazing resource. In addition, there's also FrontPage, which is impressive access to news outlets worldwide, at our fingertips.

This is where I found the "yellow book," the Leadership Directory for all Congress members. It lists committees, staff and other descriptive information; very helpful when applying for jobs.

In the office, we continue to see constituents, purge old paperwork - so save those fancy folder covers when you make a visit, catch up on constituent mail (which we now are answering by email if you emailed us), and other end-of-year tasks. We're also gearing up for next year's new session, prioritizing issues and preparing background briefs on them, identifying constituent groups who to include in the effort, and planning a staff retreat in early February. Never a dull moment.

Earlier this week I had dinner with the new APHA Fellow for 2009 (shout out to Monica Feit) and our APHA sponsor. It was fun to now know the answers to her understandable questions, and to share experiences and advice. APHA has funding for a 2010 fellow, too, so if you're interested (and, as you can tell, it's a fabulous experience if you could spend a year in D.C.), keep your eyes out for an announcement around March.

The rest of my year will be spent preparing an presentation for an advocacy class at George Washington University, memos and a panel presentation for incoming Brookings LEGIS Fellows, and spending some free time in the city with spouse and friends, just playing and enjoying the holiday season.

So, fingers crossed for a good view of the inaugural swearing in and parade, and for a happy, healthy, safe holiday and prosperous new year for all.

Thanks for reading.

POSTED BY FERN GOODHART AT 10:12 AM 0 COMMENTS

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2008

We're Still Here

Recess is a distant memory, as crisis begets crisis, and comedy tragically reigns.

The House passed a bailout package for the automakers (after their return plea), which the Senate Republicans have understandable concerns about, and are proposing an alternative - which Majority Leader Reid said he'd consider. Does a weekend session loom?

As President-elect Obama continues to make cabinet appointments, the Congressional staff dominoes also continue. And with the Illinois Governor Rod Blagojevich selling the vacant Senate seat (what was he thinking?), the two-step of interest over that seat speeds up. The Minnesota senate seat is the last remaining undecided election, and the New York and Illinois seats remain to be appointed. Committee seats and chair-person-ships remain to be determined, and it looks as if no additional Cabinet seats will go to sitting Congressmembers (although you never know). The halls of the House buildings (Cannon, Russell, Longworth) are filled with outgoing office furniture (often with Bush/Chaney stickers on the filing cabinets), and half the office doors seem to be nameless now.

Health care reform is getting reinvigorated, with more briefings on and off the Hill on the subject, the appointment of former South Dakota Senator Tom Daschle as health czar and the verbal positioning of the HELP, Finance and Ways and Means Committees all placing their markers on the table of debate. SCHIP (state children's health insurance program), health IT (information technology), prevention (hurrah!) and improving how the CBO (Congressional Budget Office) "scores" the bill are all in play.

The country is so in debt that almost anything is willing to be talked about. Pity our grandchildren, although reform is very much needed, and a cost saver in the long-term.

The holiday is in the air, as is the Norwegian Embassy display again at Union Station of the model train (with the trolls under the bridge like last year). Now I know I've been here a year. Apartments have their

holiday lights on, the Capitol and White House trees are decorated and lit, and scores of receptions are advertised over the staffers' emails. Even I have paperwhite narcissus coming up on the windowsill.

The Senator hosted his annual staff luncheon at a wonderful restaurant, where we spent the afternoon relaxing, singing and having fun. I can't say more about the jokes without revealing the office, but wit and witticism abounded.

The new Capitol Visitor Center opened with pomp and ceremony, along with great criticism of design and cost. (Regardless, it's worth a visit.) And the inaugural stands are further along, as the freshly cut wood aromas wafts passed us pedestrians. Ads are increasing in local newspapers and on Craigslist as residents hope to make big bucks by renting out their apartments for out-of-town inauguration visitors (e.g., \$8000 for 4 days - and this one's five miles away!).

The NJ Public Health Association invited me to its annual meeting to talk about legislative advocacy - a favorite topic of mine these days. It was nice to see friends and colleagues. Otherwise time is spent meeting with the very occasional constituent, job hunting, keeping up with the dominoes of job openings, and trying to stay healthy (a race I seem to be losing right now, with a cough and sore throat I'm guessing I picked up on an airplane flight to visit my mother).

With 12 new Senators, and many Republican staffers looking for new jobs, the competition is keen for new openings. Most of the ads seems to be for press secretaries, schedulers, and legislative assistants for finances and foreign policy. Fingers remain crossed, and maybe hiring is especially slow over the holidays. I believe the new Senators are sworn in on January 6th.

The rest of the month looks like finishing business, finishing the transition, preparing for the holidays, and finding a job (unlikely until February?), plus my birthday. My heart goes out to all of the unemployed (who now likely don't have health insurance, either).

The DC Metro is falling apart, the Congress didn't uphold its gun ban, and now they're allowing the bars to stay open until 5am - a perfect storm brewing?

POSTED BY FERN GOODHART AT 7:45 PM 0 COMMENTS

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2008

Drama Continues

Well, it's starting to be clear who some of POTUS-elect's cabinet picks

will be, and the dominoes continue in the Senate. Every time a Senator is selected, an office turns over. And Senator Kerry is waiting to see if he'll be selected before filling his vacancy. Certainly there's strong confidence in the cabinet selections so far, and it's equally certain a dramatic time in general, with an urgency to make magic (okay, so I'm not managing expectations well).

In the meantime, the Senate is in recess for Thanksgiving, preparing to return for Banking hearings on the automakers' proposal, then full session for economic stimulus legislation. We continue to summarize, organize, cosponsor and draft legislation. And staffers are trying to slip away for a much needed vacation this week. Fingers crossed for an opportunity to explore the upper rim of inside the Capitol dome when the Senate returns, as only a Member or the Sergeant-in-Arms is allowed to take anyone up there.

I heard Obama's letter of resignation read into the Senate Congressional Record last week (by coincidence, and was as moved by it as the Senator Mikulski (Maryland), who was recognized to speak next and was equally surprised, recognizing the historic significance of the moment). Additional historic moments continued throughout the week, such as with Senator Stevens' (Alaska) speech and "yielding the floor" for possibly the last time in his long career.

Job hunting continues, although with the Senate so busy, two seats still undetermined and cabinet picks still being made, the Senate hasn't even made room assignments for new offices (the House had its office lottery last week). Many announcements for interns and entry level, and for senior level folks with more experience.

I'm continuing to explore the city, especially as friends and family come to visit. Three new restaurants discovered: a new Tapas in Georgetown, a family Italian restaurant downtown, and a brunch crepe place near Dupont Circle; yum! We toured the White House Visitors Center (run by the Park Service, interesting place), returned to the Museum of the American Indian, and spent hours in the Holocaust Museum. All compelling in different ways.

Also slipped into the Library of Congress Jefferson Building - stunning! Probably the most majestic building in the city - gorgeous architecture, frescoes and tile work floor and ceiling, sculpture, marble columns, etc., as well as being the largest library anywhere in the world - 500 miles of book shelves (not in that building, obviously). I hadn't realized it had displays of popular culture, Bob Hope and vaudeville, original scripts (from the Marx Bros. to Seinfeld and the Simpsons) as well as first rate books, maps, journals, and more. A must see, I have to say!

In addition, my spousal unit and I had a preview tour of the new capitol visitor center, which doesn't officially open until 12/2. A beautifully designed space underneath the capitol, which brings to life the history and functioning of Congress. While that might sound "dry," the center was anything but!

Walking on all of this marble has caught up to my knees again. Why don't they make comfortable women's shoes with enough support that don't look so ugly?

Now to spend time with family and friends for the holidays, and hope the market doesn't tank in the meantime.

POSTED BY FERN GOODHART AT 7:13 PM 0 COMMENTS

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2008

Lame Duck Begins

Staffers are back in suits and heels (not the guys), newly elected members are in town, and it's business as usual. Just colder.

Lots happening on the gossip front of who's who, where, when and why – it's a political Peyton Place. Now it looks as if Senator Stevens (Alaska) is unlikely to be allowed to stay even if he is re-elected, so that's one for the Democrats. There's lots of speculation on appointments and replacements, so that parlor games continues.

Health care reform is on the agenda for getting attention, although who knows how far it will go? Business, hospitals and physicians are all on board for major reform – finally – a good thing for change. Rather than waiting for President-elect Barack Obama to take office next year or for the 111th Congress to convene, Senate Democratic leaders are making plans now for a major overhaul of the health care system.

Max Baucus, chair of the Finance Committee, and Edward M. Kennedy, chair of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, are talking together about how to craft an overhaul that both committees would be involved in. Baucus said a comprehensive health care overhaul will be his top priority next year (major changes to: public and private insurance plans and changing the way health care is delivered and paid for?). And, thank goodness, fully funding SCHIP (state children's health insurance programs) looks very likely.

This is the lame duck session, so everyone's back, the new kids (House and Senate) are in for orientation, photos, committee assignments, office assignments, hiring staff, etc. It's like college orientation, only

more so.

In a spirit of mending ill will and moving forward, the Senate Democratic Caucus voted 42-13 to allow Sen. Lieberman to keep his chairmanship of the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, but to remove him as chair of the Environment and Public Works Subcommittee on Private Sector and Consumer Solutions to Global Warming and Wildlife Protection. There was rumor about this for weeks.

The Senate GOP voted today on its leadership for the 111th Congress. The results:

- Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell
- Minority Whip Jon Kyl
- GOP Conference Chair Lamar Alexander
- GOP Policy Committee Chair John Ensign
- GOP Conference vice chair John Thune
- National Republican Senatorial Committee Chair John Cornyn

Also today, the House held a hearing on the Temporary Asset Relief Program (TARP), and the Senate Banking Committee held a hearing with the big three automakers.

Yesterday I watched the Freshmen Democratic senators get their first official photo taken with Reid; with three faces missing since their races are still undecided.

I've been sending applications to offices hoping for a few interviews, but so far only "no thank you's" for jobs off the Hill. Sigh.

And boy, that Metro system is hungry – first it gets my favorite umbrella, later my wool hat, and now my leather glove – what a drag.

Most farmers' markets are ending, holiday wreaths are up on Union Station, and the Senate cafeteria is closed for improvements. I'm wondering how few days are left to this dream job.

Question: any guesses for who POTUS-elect will name in his cabinet?

POSTED BY FERN GOODHART AT 7:12 PM 1 COMMENTS

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2008

Memorial Day

I'm just back from a bicycle self-tour of the capital monuments and memorials. What better place to pay respect and homage to the

veterans and fallen heroes than at our national monuments?

What an honor to live in a country with the potential to be great. And it's hard not to feel grateful, humbled and in awe of the courage and willingness of people to serve in the military (regardless of our feelings of the rightness or wrongness of combat).

Ceremonies included laying wreaths on all the memorials: WW II, Vietnam, Korea; lectures at the monuments: Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, FDR and other activities, but I couldn't find a parade, interestingly enough.

This was the first Veteran's Day that I haven't worked in 23 years, so it was nice to have the day off to visit the memorials.

Last night was the Mark Twain prize at the Kennedy Center, celebrating the life and humor of George Carlin. It was hysterical. Comics came out to tell stories about Carlin, and bits of his bits were shown on a large screen. Comics included Margaret Cho, Denis Leary, Bill Maher, Joan Rivers, Jon Stewart and Lily Tomlin. It was interesting to see the older comics squint at the teleprompter placed 28 rows back in the theater as they read their monologues.

Work is starting to gear up for next week's lame duck session, although staff in many offices are still away (email auto replies about being back on 11/14 or 11/17). In my office, we're still working on researching new bills, speeches and background material.

The Hill newspapers continue to guess at cabinet and executive White House staff positions, Congressional committee appointments, and progress on additional economic stimulus packages for next week. The media finally had a tour of the new Capitol Visitors Center (which we fellows previewed during the summer), and it remains fabulous and definitely worth seeing.

At the same time, many of us outgoing fellows are job hunting, and starting to mentor the incoming fellows. Apparently, newly elected Senators likely won't be filling the positions that I'm most eligible for until early next year, so the wait seems longer than I would have liked. It's understandable that the more senior positions are filled first.

It's been quite a year. I'd love to stay another.

POSTED BY FERN GOODHART AT 4:41 PM 0 COMMENTS

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2008

Pinch Me!

Wow! The late Tuesday evening spontaneous eruption of pure joy, relief, celebration and inspiration! Especially for the outcome, and a wee bit that it's finally over.

I worked the polls on election day, watching the largest turnout that I can remember. Neighbors greeted neighbors as they stood on line patiently to cast their ballot, bringing their children with them to witness their voting. I was particularly encouraged to see all of the first-time voters, young people, new citizens, many having their photo taken by family members to mark the historic occasion.

The Newseum on Pennsylvania Avenue kept up the November 5th newspaper "first pages" from all of the states and many other countries, by demand, so more people could see the headlines. Of course, all of the headlines, and the accompanying huge photos, were of the President-elect, often the scene of him with his family as they came out to greet the crowd for the first time as president-elect, at Grant Park in Chicago. I've never seen so many people at the headline display cases outside the Newseum (which I pass every day when I walk home). Not only were these crowds larger, but many people were taking photos of the newspapers themselves as another memento.

I believe this will be one of those defining moments, where decades from now we will remember where we were when the media announced the election results and we listened to his first speech.

The Senate offices are still very quiet, with many staffers slowly returning from the campaign trails. Now we're playing the parlor game of guessing Obama's cabinet members and close staff appointments, which are expected to come quickly and thoughtfully. I'm of the opinion that he needs to be cautious not appointing too many fellow Senators or Senate staffers, but that opinion and a token will get you into the Metro.

I attending the "morning after" panel at Eagleton Institute of Politics yesterday, and a similar program at the Brookings Institution this morning, where pundits (academics, reporters and editors) reflected and analyzed the outcome and voting patterns of the election. Prevailing wisdom: manage expectations, and while not a huge mandate, do something soon. Even the homeless hanging at the railroad station remarked, "Don't expect miracles - he's gotta fix a lotta shit."

In the office we're still writing letters to federal officials, drafting legislation to (we hope) drop during lame duck session expected in two weeks, preparing speeches and press releases, as life for an incumbent goes on. Everyone's clamoring for tickets to the inauguration.

We also get emails about new positions, and how to apply for staff openings for the incoming members. I already sent a resume for one Senate seat that hasn't even been decided yet! (Minnesota). So we'll see how this whole process goes.

Meanwhile, it's warm in the capitol, the pansies are planted for fall, and there's two more weeks left for the farmer's market.

Oh, how nice it feels to be hopeful again! And as the political cartoon in the Fort Lauderdale newspaper showed a drawing of Martin Luther King, Jr. with the caption: Pinch Me!

POSTED BY FERN GOODHART AT 6:08 PM 0 COMMENTS

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