

Internships for Congressman C.L. "Butch" Otter

Interning in Congressman C.L. "Butch" Otter's office offers those interested in the legislative process an exciting opportunity to see the federal government in action. You not only have the chance to observe policy-making and legislative action as it unfolds, but also to be directly involved in the workings of the United States House of Representatives. Throughout internships, you get to see live debate on current issues, work with Idaho constituents, and begin networking in the political world. If you are looking to someday start a career in the political arena, interning is the way to open the door. Many of those working in the federal legislature began on the Hill as interns. After serving as an intern, you will see your world with a broader perspective.

Congressman Otter's office offers internships throughout the year, for typically one semester in length. Internships involve both administrative and substantive duties. We feel strongly that an internship is much more than a chance to sort mail or to become well acquainted with the ins and outs of the copy machine! In addition to answering phones and running errands, you will find yourself doing everything from working with Idaho constituents to researching issues to sitting in on legislative hearings and working on legislative projects. Although most internships in the House of Representatives are not paid positions, many interns have made arrangements with school accreditation programs to receive credit for their internships. And the opportunities created by an internship extend beyond the experience of working on Capitol Hill. Life in and around the nation's capital offers the unique chance to discover history--through museums, monuments, and tours of momentous places and times in United States history--and history in the making. If you are interested in working in a Congressional office but don't want to work in DC, internships in Congressman Otter's district offices are also available.

If you are motivated and hard working, and if you have an interest in learning more about the federal legislative process and assisting Idahoans with questions regarding the federal government, Congressman Otter's office is looking for you. We encourage applicants from all areas of study. Preference is given to resident Idahoans or students in Idaho colleges and universities going into their senior year.

Responsibilities and Expectations

The responsibilities and expectations of interns are both substantive and administrative. Some of the most valuable components of an internship are the direct contact with the legislative process and the chance for you to get your own feet wet. These responsibilities include:

- ▶ working with the legislative correspondent to compose correspondence with constituents
- ▶ researching bills and issues
- ▶ attending and reporting on legislative hearings
- ▶ working on legislative projects
- ▶ shadowing staffers to experience all aspects of the workings of a Congressional office.

In addition to legislative duties, interns are also expected to assist in the administrative duties shared by staffers. These include:

- ▶ opening, sorting, and delivering incoming mail
- ▶ answering phones, greeting constituents, and giving tours to Idaho visitors
- ▶ running errands, copying, filing, faxing

Requirements

The requirements for applying for an internship with Congressman Otter's office should be taken into consideration:

- ▶ Students from all fields of study are welcome.
- ▶ Preference is given to Idahoans or students from Idaho colleges and universities.
- ▶ Students going into their senior year of college are always given first consideration.

In our applicants we also look for:

- ▶ familiarity with Windows 95 and WordPerfect.
- ▶ competence in Internet use (primarily Netscape and Internet Explorer)
- ▶ proficient typing abilities
- ▶ ability to communicate effectively, both writing and oral
- ▶ self-motivation and eagerness to learn the legislative process

Application Process

In order to apply, please include the following:

- 1) Completed application
- 2) A current copy of your resume
- 3) A brief essay (250 words) explaining why you would like to intern with Congressman Otter
- 4) A short writing sample
- 5) Two Letters of recommendation

Send applications to:

Congressman C.L. "Butch" Otter
attn: Intern Coordinator
802 W. Bannock, Suite 101
Boise, ID 83702

or fax to Malisah Johnson at (202) 225-3029.

Please note! Due to recently implemented security procedures, mail to the U.S. Capitol and office buildings is delayed 4-6 weeks. Please do not mail applications to Washington, DC.

We are looking forward to sharing the internship experience with you. If you have additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact Congressman Otter's district office in your area or Malisah Johnson in our Washington, D.C. office.

INTERNING FOR CONGRESSMAN C.L. “BUTCH” OTTER: The Nitty-Gritty on your trip to the Hill

The staff in Congressman Otter’s office is delighted that you will soon be joining us in Washington, DC. Whether it is a move across the country or just down the East Coast, coming out to our nation’s Capitol is a huge adventure, and we want to make sure you feel comfortable and excited about your trip here. In the following few pages, I have attempted to dispel a few rumors, clear up a few obscurities, and answer some questions you probably have—remember that many of the members of Mr. Otter’s staff have served as interns and been in the same place you are.

Interns are a fairly recent addition to Capitol Hill life. Just a few years ago, some offices had one intern, while most did not. Today, nearly all Congressional offices have several, and there are hundreds on the Hill each semester. It is truly one of the most unique, exciting, and valuable experiences in America, and a valuable resource for Congress.

What the Otter Office Gets

From the office perspective, the deal is simple: You give us a summer or semester of “hard work” and “long hours” in exchange for living and working in Washington, learning the legislative process inside and out, and getting acquainted with the office of Idaho’s Representative of the First Congressional District—not a bad deal for a short term.

What You Get

A Washington, DC, internship is an incredible experience. It can be some of the best few months of your life, it can help you fall in love with the political process, and you can gain an in-depth understanding of the self-governmental system. It is a chance to get to know lots of people, to make contacts and friendships that can last a lifetime, and get a “foot in the door” for a career in politics. An internship is truly an experience about which it can be said that what you get out of it depends largely on what you *want* to get out of it.

All this, of course, depends on your initiative. *Capitol Hill does not open its doors to you—you have to make the move yourself.* You can be miserable if you spend too much time thinking about the sheer boredom of some of the tasks. Instead of thinking about all the copies you’re making or letters you’re filing, think about what you’re learning from them as you go. Instead of thinking about all the errands you’re running, think about all the people in different offices on the Hill you’re getting to know. In other words, look at the detail work as the price you pay for the knowledge you’re absorbing by *simply being here.* The pearl of this job is found simply in where you are—smack dab in the middle of the most powerful city in the world, caught up in the nitty-gritty of lawmaking. Think about the chances you have to attend Washington’s famous receptions, power-lunches, and cultural events. If you can keep this perspective, you’ll never forget the experience.

The Job

Interns assist the various staff members within the office. Tasks fall into two categories: legislative and administrative. Legislative tasks can range from research projects to attending hearings and reporting to staff members to writing correspondence about current issues.

Administrative duties include answering phones, greeting visitors, running errands, sorting and delivering mail, and assisting with data input. Interns also have the opportunity to attend receptions, hearings, and seminars.

The office atmosphere gives you the opportunity to apply academic skills to a professional situation. Because of the direct contact interns have with Capitol Hill offices, the program provides them with a head start on a career and a good understanding of the political process.

EXPECTATION AND DISAPPOINTMENTS

It is unfortunately quite common for interns to come to Washington with serious misunderstandings about what the job involves. We want you to come with both realistic expectations and genuine enthusiasm so that you can sincerely enjoy your experience here and make the most of your time in Washington.

Common Misunderstandings of Interns

I'll be advising the Congressman on how to vote on critical issues, or I'll be advising the staff on areas on which I am an expert. Truth is, no one is an expert when they first come to town—often even if they are hired as such! Spend your time listening, learning, observing, and absorbing.

I'll be writing speeches and drafting bills. There are some opportunities along these lines such as background research, but for the most part, this is the job of the staff. They are hired for just such work, and your job will be to help them however possible.

I'll be doing detailed research on particular issues. Congress has access to the best research in the world in the Congressional Research Service, and Washington is the information capital of the world. While you will be doing some research, it usually involves pulling together research that has already been done, perhaps distilling it to a readable level.

I'll have a big desk, an office, a secretary, and lots of perks. Right. Only if you're the Congressman. In fact, no one else in the office has any of the above—the office is a small space crammed with desks, people, and Idaho memorabilia! You are here to join the ranks. Which, coincidentally, is the best place to be—the perks of this job are a great working environment, a good boss to work for, being in the eye of the political hurricane, and having lots and lots to do...

I'll be a key player in the decision-making process. The goal of an internship is to learn—to learn what the policy-making process is, how it works, and who is involved in it. This knowledge will help you to become a key player later on.

Some Disappointments Interns Experience

I spend a lot of time answering the phone, Xeroxing, stuffing envelopes, running errands, and doing pure "grunt work". Just look around you—everyone do the same. No one is above

sorting faxes or answering constituent calls. Politics is 90% pure grunt work. Don't concentrate on the routine nature of your tasks; think of it as the price you pay for the learning opportunity.

There isn't enough time to attend hearings, lectures, and fun events, even though I'm required to do so. One of the things you have to learn about political life is that you have to make days last 36 hours, not 24. If you're the clock-punching type who wants to go home at 6 every day, you'll never experience all Washington has to offer.

People give me piles of work and don't explain how to do it, or even where to find the answers. This brings to mind the key way to "make it" in Washington: **ASK QUESTIONS!** People rarely take the time to explain everything to you, and they won't know that you are lost unless you say so. **The earlier you learn to articulate questions, the sooner you will get your feet under you.**

GETTING AROUND IN WASHINGTON, DC

Washington may feel like a maze until you begin to understand the system. Once you see it, however, you find that you can easily get to almost any point in the city. Getting a good DC map and becoming familiar with the layout of the city will be helpful. You should learn the different neighborhoods, as well as the unique "quad system" of the city. Washington has an outstanding mass-transit system, and the combination of bus and subway routes can take you anywhere in the city within an hour.

At all times, feel free to ask for help and directions. Washingtonians tend to be quite helpful in this respect, and in many parts of the city there is truly a "policeman of every corner". Also, ask other members of the staff for advice, and always remember that others have faced the same problems before.

Regarding safety in the city, many Westerners tend to hear only the crime statistics when it comes to Washington, DC. Safety must always be forefront in one's mind—be aware of where you are and where you should not be. Common sense will save you from finding yourself in an awkward or dangerous situation most of the time. Believe it or not, this is a place where people actually live and function and go outside when it is dark. Especially following the September 11th attacks, security on Capitol Hill is more stringent than ever, and the DC Metro system is one of the cleanest and safest in the world. Please do not hesitate to ask for help if you need it or even if you are unsure, but rest assured that it is very possible to live and work in Washington, DC, like a normal, sane human being.

Travel and Transportation

There is a serious shortage of parking spaces on Capitol Hill, and the ones available to our office are reserved for staff members first. Thus, it is advisable to take the subway or bus to work. Many metro stops outside of the city have parking available during the day. For information on the Metrorail or Metrobus system, call (202) 637-7000 or log onto www.wmata.com. They can tell you about subway and bus routes and times, and other details.

Commuting on the subway (Metro) and bus system averages \$1.10 or more each way during non-rush hours, and more during rush hours. If you ride the subway and then transfer to a bus line, a transfer pass reduces the price of the bus ride. In spite of what you may have heard, Washington is a fairly easy city to get around. The taxicab system is based on a unique “zone system,” which keeps rates unusually low. The bus system is easy to use, once you learn the routs. The subway system is the newest and cleanest in the nation.

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What are my working hours? Office hours are from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday, with a one-hour lunch break to be taken when someone else is available to cover the door and the phones. While this does not necessarily translate to working hours, it is a good general rule. When Congress is not in session, times may vary.

What should I wear to work? Ah, the question most stressed-over by potential interns! Dress on the Hill is professional. This means suits, ties, dress slacks, skirt—more than just khakis and a polo shirt. You will catch on after a few days. Of course, one of the most vital parts of the Hill attire is a pair of comfortable shoes. This is a must for living in Washington DC in general—in a city where it is easier to walk than drive, the first thing in your suitcase must be easy walking shoes. On the job, it is more important to have comfortable shoes than cute shoes—you will spend more time taping band-aids to your feet than getting legislative experience if you don’t set this priority. The Capitol complex consists of many large street blocks, a myriad of tunnels, and circular hallways that don’t seem to go to the room you are trying to find. Having shoes that will get you there is a must.

How late will I be expected to work during the week? While the office officially closes at 6 p.m., Congress does not necessarily hold to a schedule. During particularly hot debates, votes may go until 2 in the morning. Staff in our office starts the day early and ends it late, and you may be asked to stay late to assist with last minute projects. However, for the most part, when 6:00 rolls around you will be able to leave.

Apart from day-to-day office business, are there other things I will be expected to do? You will have a number of opportunities to participate in extra-office activities. These include receptions, lunches, and attending sessions in the House of Representatives. In addition, summer interns will be attending the Summer Lecture Series for interns, put on by the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress. This way you will be able to put into historical and theoretical perspective the things you are seeing and hearing every day. Also, you will have the opportunity to give tours of the United States Capitol, a building full of history and history in the making. This is a fantastic opportunity not only to become well acquainted with your nation’s capitol yourself, but also to share that knowledge with Idahoans who come out to visit.

We are sincerely looking forward to your coming to Washington. Should you have any last minute questions or concerns as you prepare for this experience, please don’t hesitate to call our DC office at (202) 225-6611.