

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

INTERNS FROM DOWN UNDER
GIVE CONGRESS A THUMBS UP

HON. LORETTA SANCHEZ

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, March 28, 2000

Ms. SANCHEZ. Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise today to honor five outstanding women who recently completed internships on Capitol Hill. The students came to Washington, D.C. at their own expense through a first-of-its-kind program offered by Flinders University in Adelaide, South Australia.

As our colleagues will surely agree, the best congressional internship programs and interns offer a unique window into the future. Every year, Congress offers thousands of students a brief time to look through this window—the chance to explore and examine this legislative world of ours, now 212 years old. Fortunately for those of us who serve in this Chamber, they're not the only beneficiaries. We learn a thing or two ourselves. This was most definitely the case with the Flinders program.

Australia and the United States are close cousins in many, many ways. But despite all that our respective histories and the connectivity of Internet Age have to offer, we remain separated by a great physical distance that cannot change. It's a mere 8,000 miles from my district to Adelaide—and it most definitely was a great privilege for Congress to host five young ambassadors and bridge this distance for however brief a time. This is what Louise King did in the office of Senator CHARLES SCHUMER, Sunshine Elmore contributed to my California colleague JUANITA MILLENDER-MCDONALD, Kerrie Daniel brought to LOUISE SLAUGHTER, and Narelle Hards added to the Democratic staff of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

Of course, the greatest pleasure I have is singling out Estee Fiebiger for her contributions to me and my office. Estee had a great enthusiasm and propensity for politics, especially foreign policy. She played an essential role in drafting analytical reports and helping me initiate a detailed analysis of the Human Rights situation in Vietnam.

Estee's eagerness to learn and to experience all aspects of American politics highlights her achievements and her potential for continued success. Along with her excellent research, linguistic, and writing abilities, Estee's pleasant personality was accompanied with great skill and intelligence. Very simply, she was a delight to have in the office. The duration of the program—6 weeks—was not nearly enough.

Mr. Speaker, I sincerely hope this modest, unbureaucratic program will inspire other Australian and American institutions to establish similar exchanges, for both students and professionals. To improve understanding of our processes, our politics and of our multicultural peoples to the finest degrees, we need to connect people with people in person. This will never change.

As I'm sure my colleagues who participated in the Flinders program will attest, it was a pleasure to work with interns who are teachers as much as they are students. I know their families, friends, and communities are very proud of their daring to be such pioneers. On February 21st, the Roll Call newspaper published a wonderful account of the experiences of these women.

I submit the article to be included in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD—and in so doing wish Estee, Louise, Narelle, Sunshine and Kerrie every continued success.

[From Roll Call Around the Hill, Feb. 21, 2000]

INTERNS FROM DOWN UNDER
(By Edith Chan)

Congress isn't very down and dirty—at least in the eyes of a group of interns from Down Under.

Five students from Australia who just wrapped up internships on Capitol Hill say Congress is actually much less partisan than their own country's parliament.

"In Australia, it can get a lot worse," said Sunshine Elmore, one of the students who came to Washington through a first-of-its-kind program offered by Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia.

Eric Federing, a former Democratic Hill aide who helped found the program, noted that crossing party lines in Australia often proves to be politically damaging.

"The rigor of party politics is much stronger in Australia than in the United States," said Federing, who is now director of business public policy at accounting giant KPMG.

"If a Member crossed party lines [on a vote], it is strongly, strongly frowned upon."

Federing, who most recently worked as press secretary for Sen. Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.), decided to start the internship program after traveling extensively through Australia.

"The experience is fantastic—it is beyond my own expectations," he said of the program's first year. "My only regret is that we could not bring more students over."

The interns left town last week after spending six weeks in the offices of various Democratic Members, including Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) and Rep. Loretta Sanchez (D-Calif.).

"The staff has been really encouraging, and they have been really inspiring in helping us participate in a lot of things," said Elmore, who interned in the office of Rep. Juanita Millender-McDonald (D-Calif.).

The students came to Washington in early January. In interviews before leaving town, the students said their perception of America—and Americans—has dramatically changed.

"There were a lot of ideas about America, and lots of surprises too," said Narelle Hards, who worked for the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

The students were especially excited about being able to watch the Super Bowl live, instead of at 3 a.m. However, they had to watch the Australia Open tennis tournament, normally on during prime time in their home country, at 3 a.m. instead.

They were also impressed with the way Congressional aides comported themselves.

"I really admire the staff," said Louise Kings, who worked for Schumer. "They are loyal and they work really hard."

Student Kerrie Daniel recalled that the most memorable moment during her internship came when she got to meet President Clinton earlier this month during a press event. She remembers jumping across the chairs—and getting a small bruise in the process—to shake the the President's hand.

"It was amazing to see an important figure in person rather than on TV," said Daniel, who worked for Rep. Louise Slaughter (D-N.Y.). "The President is a fantastic speaker."

After spending six weeks on the Hill, Hards said the person she most admires is Rep. James Oberstar (D-Minn.), ranking member of the Transportation Committee.

Hards said she was impressed by her boss's knowledge and recalled one instance when he suddenly went from Speaking English to French in the same sentence.

Their internships also helped to break the cultural barriers and stereotypes between Australians and their American colleagues.

"The idea Australians get is that Americans are very USA-centered," said Daniel. "But I think that they are very interested in knowing about other places, about other things in the world."

And as Daniel found out, there is one thing that is constantly on Americans' minds.

"Americans are eager to find out about Australians. Everyone wants to know more about the Olympics," she said.

Besides admiring the doggedness of many Hill staffers, the interns from Australia are also encouraged by the large number of women working in the federal government.

Estee Fiebiger noted the scarcity of women working in the Australian government, and said the dominating presence of female leaders in Congress has inspired her to brave the grounds of foreign affairs—a traditionally male-dominated field.

"Here, no one puts a damper on us because we are women and we are from Australia," said Fiebiger, who interned for Sanchez. "Instead, everyone was curious and was very willing to help us. Instead of putting a damper on us, it made us more enthusiastic."

In addition to the legislative workload, the students managed to squeeze in a lot of sightseeing around D.C. Their most interesting day, as Elmore recounted, was building a snowman "in the middle of the blizzard."

Their favorite activities outside of work included museum-hopping.

"We thought the Smithsonian was one museum," Elmore said, adding that six weeks was not long enough to see and do everything they wanted in Washington.

The students are heading back to Australia to complete their final year at Flinders, where they are all majoring in American studies, and said they can't wait to plan their next visit to the United States.

The only flaw the students saw in their program was that their stay was too short.

"I wish that the internship was longer," Daniel said. "We're leaving just as things were starting to get going."

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