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State of the Union Day

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State of the Union Day by Raymond W. Stock, V'75

President Bush delivered his much-awaited State of the Union Address on January 28, 2003. That day the streets of Capitol Hill and the halls of Congress were flooded with thousands drawn to the epicenter of American power – although only a privileged few were lucky enough to occupy one of the precious seats in the packed gallery. Most of these visitors wash in and out of town quickly like the tide. The following evening, I was able to sit alone in the galleries of the Senate and House and watch the proceedings on the floor below. That's how it goes in the nation's capital.

Last year I successfully applied for a Congressional Science Fellowship, which is sponsored by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and the American Veterinary Medical Foundation (AVMF). Congressional Science Fellows serve for one-year in Washington, D.C., as representatives of the veterinary profession on the staffs of Members of Congress or Congressional Committees.

The morning of January 28, I took my usual route past the Hart Senate Building (site of the mailed anthrax contamination), the Supreme Court and the Library of Congress to my office in the Cannon House Office Building, which is adjacent to the Capitol. After checking the congressman's schedule, my morning activities included answering email and returning phone messages. Two other legislative assistants (LA's) and I were to have a meeting that afternoon with our "Boss" (the traditional term used by staffers for their representative) to discuss upcoming legislative issues.

My "Boss" is John E. Peterson who represents Pennsylvania's Fifth Congressional District. It is the largest rural district east of the Mississippi River encompassing all or part of 17 counties in north central and northwestern Pennsylvania. Within its borders are Pennsylvania State University, the Allegheny National Forest, and a multitude of far-flung rural communities.

Representative Peterson has strong interests in representing rural America and is a member of the Congressional Rural Caucus. He is a member of the Appropriations Committee, arguably the most powerful House committee, where he serves on the Energy and Water Development, Interior, and the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education subcommittees. The congressman is also a member of the Resources Committee, where he serves on the National Parks, Recreation, and Public Lands and the Forests and Forest Health subcommittees because the Allegheny National Forest is in his district.

Members of the Appropriations Committee have the privilege and power to determine federal expenditures. This makes them sought after by the thousands of private citizens and professional government relations' representatives who bring their lobbying efforts to Washington. One of my jobs is to help the congressman by meeting with many of the lobbyists.

My morning was spent writing short memos to Peterson concerning the various "Dear Colleagues" letters that cross my desk daily. Other members of Congress generally send them requesting support in co-sponsoring bills or signing onto letters requesting actions directed to the President, department secretaries, or agency directors. Many of these include bills that never passed out of

committee in last year's 107th Congress and have to be reintroduced in the 108th. A computer search of information from the Legislative Information Service or the Congressional Research Service helps get me up to speed quickly on the essential elements of the bills.

Early in the afternoon, I used the legislative drafting service of the House Legislative Counsel's office in an effort to remedy a problem concerning counties both in Pennsylvania and nationwide who failed to qualify for the Livestock Compensation Program. This monetary compensation program for livestock and dairy producers was designed to provide relief for forage crop failures during the preceding summer's drought.

Many deserving counties in the country, including one in my district that represents a thousand dairy farmers, failed to qualify for the program due to a number of administrative reasons. Our job was to remedy the problem by legislation. An attorney in the Counsel's office converted my explanation into the language we needed within the hour. The additional pressure of other representatives and senators representing agricultural areas resulted in \$3.1 billion appropriated for drought relief in the FY 2003

Omnibus Appropriations bill signed into law by President Bush in February 2003.

Later that afternoon, the two other LA's and I met with Peterson to discuss our specific areas of responsibility. Mine include agriculture, telecommunications, immigration, welfare, science and technology, veterans and welfare. Bills are presented to the congressman, discussed and courses of action decided upon (i.e., to co-sponsor or support). When the appropriations cycle for FY 2004 gets into high gear in March, the workload of

issues will accelerate dramatically.

I left the office around 7:00 p.m. Security surrounding the Capitol had elevated dramatically during the afternoon in anticipation of the entire corpus of the legislative, executive and judicial branches congregating

within the Capitol's chambers. Security extended for a distance of five to six blocks from the Capitol grounds with busses and fire trucks serving as barriers across all of the surrounding streets.

Mounted police, scores of motorcycle officers, hundreds of Capitol Police, local police departments and state troopers from Maryland and Virginia were all present. The chopping sound of the overhead helicopters in concert with the glare of high intensity lighting and the flashing lights of hundreds of police vehicles created a surreal atmosphere. I retreated from this unsettling environment to the comfort of my tiny apartment to watch the President's annual address to Congress.

Prior to his fellowship, Dr. Stock practiced small animal medicine in the Lehigh Valley for over 25 years. He has been active in veterinary medicine organizations throughout his career, and is a member of the University of Pennsylvania Veterinary Medical Alumni Society Executive Board and a trustee of the Pennsylvania Veterinary Medical Association. Dr. Stock recently received a Master of Bioethics degree from Penn.

Editor's Note: Along with Dr. Stock, Richard A. Zappala II, V'97, was also selected as a Congressional Science Fellow, and is serving in the office of Representative Howard L. Berman, who represents California's 28th Congressional District (Los Angeles County).

For more information on the Congressional Science Fellowship program, visit the AVMF web site at <www.avmf.org>.



Raymond W. Stock, V'75 (right) with Representative John E. Peterson.