Impressed, Amazed and Intrigued

For those that did not get a chance to read my first submission (Newsletter, Fall 2005), I am serving my fellowship year in the office of Congressman Brad Miller (D-N.C., 13th District). Congressman Miller is in his second-term and serves on the Science and Financial Services Committees. As a member of Congressman Miller’s staff, I am responsible for legislative issues related to armed service, international relations, judiciary, crime/law enforcement, intelligence and veterans affairs/military quality of life. If forced to summarize my first three months in a sound bite, it would be that I am extremely impressed with the people, amazed at the amount of information, and intrigued by the politics. I’ll elaborate on these three points and then close with an observation that might be of interest to those focused on implementing the management and oversight responsibilities of U.S. space-based PNT systems.

The People
When I say that I am impressed by the people, I’m referring to two groups: the Congressman Miller’s staff and his constituents. The congressman’s staff is made up of 21 people (including myself), distributed between the Washington office and the two district offices, one in Raleigh, N.C. and one in Greensboro, N.C.

In the Washington office there is a chief of staff, a legislative director, a press secretary, a scheduler, four legislative assistants (as a fellow, I fall into this category), a staff assistant, a system’s administrator and one intern. This group of 11 people are located in two rooms, both not much larger than what I would characterize as modestly sized living rooms. Congressman Miller’s office, which is slightly smaller than those of the staff, is located between the two. Although the working conditions are close quarters, the resulting “energy and office chemistry” formed by this very dedicated group of highly motivated, young, intelligent individuals makes for a great working environment and one that I enjoy experiencing everyday. I consider myself lucky to be part of “Team Miller”.

Prior to the Thanksgiving recess, when the House remained in session late into the evening of Friday, November 18, Congressman Miller found it necessary to cancel a speaking commitment to a veterans group, the Greensboro Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA). I was asked if I would be interested in traveling down to the District and filling in for him. It was a unique opportunity for me to meet a group of constituents and at the same time be in a position to speak on issues that I am responsible for, while fielding their questions and noting their concerns on behalf of the Congressman. My take-away message: when constituents speak, you need to listen. Those that take the time to make an inquiry know the issues, and they have strong feelings on those issues.

The Information
The amount of information flowing in and out of the office is staggering. It comes in any number of forms including internal House e-mail, e-mails from constituents, digital mail (this office is one of the first offices to participate in a program to have incoming letter mail digitized offsite and sent in electronically), and regular mail such as periodicals and newsprint. A statistic that helps put into perspective the mail volume: in 2005 this office received over 32,000 pieces of incoming mail. The goal is to answer all of it. Subject matter varies across a broad spectrum of issues, but a significant percentage of this mail falls into the issue areas of environmental, health care, judiciary and social security. To paint a mental picture of constituent mail, just visualize the “star screen saver” on your computer; mail (like the stars) just keeps coming at you — it is relentless. On the other hand, as our chief of staff has mentioned on numerous occasions, you need to be concerned not with mail, but rather with the lack of it. When constituents quit writing their congressman, they are silently sending a message that they don’t believe you are making a difference.

Each day that the House is in session, televisions are tuned to C-span in order for the four legislative assistants to monitor our particular issues that may be on the agenda that day. The Internet is absolutely critical to conducting business. I can only imagine that before the Internet the wheels of government must have turned much slower, let alone the challenge of having available the information necessary to do your job as a legislative assistant in such a small office space.

Adding to the above information source are incoming telephone calls. There is a standing rule in this office that the telephone

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ince the mid-1990s, when I was still on active duty in the U.S. Coast Guard, I have had a desire to see first hand what it would be like to work on Capitol Hill.

In 1994, one of my academy classmates was assigned as a congressional liaison for a House member, and I recall envying his position. In response, I put congressional liaison on my Coast Guard assignment “dream-sheet,” but the opportunity alluded me during my Coast Guard career. Today, as a result of the Institute of Navigation’s Congressional Fellowship Program, and the understanding of management at Overlook Systems Technologies, Inc., the opportunity to live this “dream” for the next year is finally mine to experience.

ION’s First House Fellow
I am the ION’s fifth congressional fellow and the first to have a position on a congressman’s staff. For the next year, I will be working for Rep. Brad Miller (D-N.C., 13th District) who is in his second term as a member of the House of Representatives. Rep. Miller serves on the Committees on Financial Services and Science. As his legislative fellow, I will be responsible for tracking a number of issues including armed services, crime (law enforcement), defense, gun control, intelligence, international relations, judiciary and Veterans affairs/military quality of life. Given that I have only been in the office a few weeks, I will dedicate this article to the fellowship program.

This tremendous opportunity has been realized through the Congressional Science and Engineering Fellows Program that is coordinated by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), or “Triple A-S” as it is referred to by those familiar with the program. AAAS is an international non-profit organization dedicated to advancing science around the world by serving as an educator, leader, spokesperson and professional association. The Science and Engineering Fellows Program is a cooperative effort of approximately 30 national engineering and scientific organizations that provides an opportunity for scientists and engineers with public policy interests to learn about and contribute to the policy making processes in Congress. The Institute of Navigation is one of the participating scientific societies of AAAS. The AAAS fellowships program has been operating for 32 years and has placed more than 800 fellows in Congress. This year the 2005/2006 AAAS fellowship class has 144 fellows; Thirty of us are Congressional Fellows.

Orientation
Following the Labor Day weekend, all 144 AAAS Science and Technology Policy fellows assembled at the AAAS headquarters in Washington D.C. for two weeks of orientation. The orientation consisted of full days of briefings on science and policy issues at various government agencies around the D.C. area.

This allowed us to get to know each other and establish connections that will prove valuable for the coming year. Toward the latter part of the second week, the orientation process began to downsize the briefings into primary assignment areas such as the executive branch, homeland security, diplomatic services, defense, the National Institute of Health, and Capitol Hill.

The Search Phase
At the start of the third week, those of us in the congressional program began the job search phase. Provided with a list of congressional offices and committees that were interested in having a fellow, we set out with our one-page résumés to locate a job. Although we were to be guided by the list, we were encouraged to seek any position we wanted to pursue.

My excitement of what I was about to do was quickly subdued by the reality that congressional offices are extremely busy and getting an interview was not easy. I dropped off about 20 résumés, split almost equally between the House and Senate. The office I chose was the one that most appealed to my interest area, and the one where I felt I would best fit in with the office staff. I have not regretted my choice. I love it, and I can’t wait to get to work every morning.

According to my notes, 7 of my congressional fellow classmates decided to do committee work on the Senate side, eleven took positions in Senate offices, and ten took jobs in House offices. Two of the January-start fellows have not committed themselves as of this writing.

In my next submission to the ION Newsletter, I will focus on providing details on my day-to-day activities as a legislative fellow supporting a member of the United States House of Representatives. ◆
The architects of our Constitution didn’t create the two legislative bodies to pass laws, but rather to make sure that bad laws were not passed. should not ring more than twice if it is not picked up by one of the staff members in the front office. On busy days, the phone can be challenging to deal with. I estimate that no less than 60 percent of the incoming calls are from constituents offering input and opinions to the congressman on legislative issues. I must admit in my first few days in the office, I found myself not being quick to reach for the phone, subconsciously fearing my inability to converse intelligently with the vast number of legislative issues flowing into the office (my note above about informed constituents applies). However, after a few days of getting familiar with the office and observing those around me doing their work and helping me get up to speed on my issues, answering the phone was not only necessary but absolutely essential to becoming part of the team. Today, I am not only comfortable reaching for the phone, but I enjoy talking with the people, working to understand their perspective and more often than not, I find myself being educated by listening to their input and opinions. How this information is managed for the Congressman Miller would require more space than I am allotted here, but I characterize my role as an information filter and archiver who must be prepared to provide him manageable pieces of information when required for him to do his job.

The Politics
During our orientation phase of the fellowship program, I noted two interesting points: (1) activity in the Senate is all about politics, while the House is all about procedure, and (2) the architects of our Constitution didn’t create the two legislative bodies to pass laws, but rather to make sure that bad laws were not passed. In the last few months, I have learned a lot about the House procedures and the role of politics in using (or not using) those procedures. For example, being on the minority side of the aisle has its challenges given the role the Rules Committee plays in framing legislation debate. Open rules or closed rules on legislation matters controlled by the Rules Committee determines if amendments will or will not be allowed. A “Martial Law” rule was enacted at the end

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For those who may be keeping track of how many days the 109th Congress is scheduled to be in session, it is actually the least number of days since 1948. In that year the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, which President Harry Truman labeled during his reelection campaign as the “do-nothing” Congress, convened for 108 days.

During its second session the 109th Congress is scheduled to be in session just 97 days. Given this somewhat limited legislative calendar, I am still amazed at how much work there is to do.

The FY07 Budget
Between the arrival of the president’s fiscal year 2007 (FY07) budget in early February and March 16 when inputs were due to the various subcommittees building the Congressional budget, the atmosphere in all of the Congressional office buildings surrounding the Capitol took on an increased level of already high activity. It was as if a switch was thrown when the president’s budget arrived: lobbyists, constituents, college and university staff, local and state officials, businesses members, etc., walked the halls, crowded the cafeterias, and filled the offices during their half-hour, pre-arranged meetings with the congressman (and the one staff member responsible for tracking their respective appropriations bill), voicing their particular budget need.

In the wake of the Jack Abramoff lobby scandal and Senator Ted Stevens’ “Bridge to Nowhere” in the FY06 Transportation bill, I anticipated that the number of requests for “earmarks” in the FY07 budget process would have declined. On the contrary, an informal survey across numerous offices shows that this year the number was actually higher than in recent years.

For the three appropriation bills I was responsible for tracking — dealing with defense, foreign operations, and the military quality of life & veterans affairs there was more activity. How the budget will evolve as it moves through the remaining process — the committees, the parallel actions in the House and Senate, the conference reports, and then final passage — is anyone’s guess.

Following release of [the Dubai Port World] story, the office phones began to ring with concerned constituents expressing their dissatisfaction.

But regardless of that outcome, I can state with high confidence that the process will not be completed before the end of my fellowship year on Aug.w 31.

Private Bills
I have just started to research for the congressman the potential drafting of a private bill, which is a piece of legislation that is drafted to provide compensation to a specific individual or corporate body. According to the Congressional Research Service (a tremendous source of information available to members and their staffs), individuals may request relief through private bills when administrative or legal remedies have been exhausted or when no other remedy for compensation is available.

From 1817 through 1971, Congress apparently passed hundreds of the private bills, but the number has dropped significantly in recent years. Since 1986, a total of 166 private bills have been enacted by Congress.

The vast majority of private bills fall into one of two categories: immigration or individual claims. Private bills go on a special calendar, set by House rule to be the first Tuesday of each month. Those dealing with individual claims are submitted through the Judiciary Committee where they are forwarded to the Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security, and Claims.

Private bills are typically introduced in only one of the chambers and usually have no cosponsors. They must be processed in the same manner as public bills, meaning that they must pass in both chambers and be signed by the president before they are enacted into law. I am continuing to gather information on this subject and hope to be able to provide more information in my last update before the end of my fellowship year.

The Ports Deal
In late January, the national media posted a story indicating that the president had favorably endorsed a bid by Dubai Port (DP) World, a United Arab Emirates government-owned company, to acquire and run operations at six major U.S. ports.

Following release of that story, the office phones began to ring with concerned constituents expressing their dissatisfaction.

Within a day of the news reports, members of the executive branch Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS), an interagency committee responsible for generating recommendations for the president, provided the first of several briefings to congressional members and staff.

CFIUS was originally established by executive order in 1975 to monitor and evaluate the effect of foreign investment in the United States.

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COSMIC, continued from page 1

COSMIC data and products will be made available to the international science and operational communities from TACC or CDAAC. These data products include vertical profiles of bending angles, refractivity, electron density, temperature, pressure, and water vapor, and 135.6 nm radiances observed by the Tiny Ionospheric Photometer.

New Open-Loop Tracking
Kuo says that COSMIC will make use of a newly developed “open-loop tracking technique” that enables deep penetration into the Earth’s troposphere—a region of the atmosphere that starts at the Earth’s surface and extends five to nine miles high.

“We can get high quality sounding to within 1,640 feet (500 meters) of the surface—even over the tropics,” says Kuo. “This will provide valuable information on atmospheric water vapor, which is important for hurricane and severe weather prediction.”

The LEOs weigh about 62 kilograms fully fueled and circle the Earth every 100 minutes at an altitude of 700–800 kilometers with an inclination angle 72 degrees. Originally developed for the ORBCOMM data communications network, the MicroStar spacecraft built by Orbital Sciences Corporation (OSC) of Dulles, Va., was adapted to the COSMIC mission. Their design life is five years (see accompanying photo).

OSC built the prototype COSMIC satellite; the remaining five COSMIC microsatellites were then produced as kits and sent to Taiwan for assembly, with Taiwanese manufacturers contributing some of the parts.

Each satellite has four GPS antennas connected to an on-board GPS receiver. NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory designed and produced the prototype high-performance science receiver. Broad Reach Engineering built the receivers for the satellite constellation.

The satellite network grew out of an agreement between the American Institute in Taiwan and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States. Taiwan’s National Science Council and National Space Organization provided more than $80 million for the system. The U.S. National Science Foundation, lead agency for COSMIC science activities, and its partners provided the rest of the support. Major partners include NASA, NOAA, the U.S. Air Force Space Test Program, the Office of Naval Research, and the Department of Defense Space and Missile Systems Center’s Rocket Systems Launch Program of the U.S. Air Force, which also provided logistical support.

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States. The committee currently has 14 members and is chaired by the secretary of the U.S. Treasury Department.

In 1988, Congress amended the Defense Production Act and provided authority to the president to suspend or prohibit any foreign acquisition, merger, or takeover of a U.S. corporation that is determined by the president to threaten the national security of the United States. Although CFIsUS is chaired by the treasury department, neither the House Financial Services Committee nor the Senate Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee were notified of this issue prior to the media report.

Although the situation was finally defused when DP World announced in early March that it was taking steps to divest itself of U.S. port operations, the attention given this proposed transaction resulted in the House passing a bill, the Security and Accountability For Every (SAFE) Port Act, by a vote of 421-2 the week of May 1. The Senate still has to take up the legislation and, if it succeeds there, will still need to be signed by the president. The SAFE Port Act provides a lesson to me that legislation driven by an overwhelming public reaction can very rapidly move through the system.

In closing, I note that by the time this article makes it to print, I will be more than three-quarters of the way through my fellowship year. Maybe this is an unpleasant reality of getting old, but my sense is that with all this busyness the year seems to be going by much too fast!

— Prior to his appointment as the ION Congressional Fellow, Doug Taggart worked as a systems engineer for Overlook Systems Technologies, Inc. Taggart is currently serving in the office of Congressman Brad Miller (North Carolina, 13th District).
I ended my column in the spring issue of the ION Newsletter with a comment about how quickly my fellowship year was going by. I now find myself submitting my final report as the 2005-2006 ION Congressional Fellow, and things have not slowed down at all. In fact, they seem to be going faster.

In this final report, I will address public policy and scientific integrity, the global war on terror’s impact on legislation, legislation arising from current events (theft of personal data), and telecommunications (net neutrality).

Public Policy and Scientific Integrity

My fellowship year has been coordinated by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). The Institute of Navigation is one of more than 30 national engineering and scientific organizations participating in AAAS.

The goal of the AAAS program is to provide an opportunity for scientists and engineers with public policy interests to learn about and contribute to the policy-making processes in Congress. The congressman I am supporting (Brad Miller, D-N.C.) is on the House Science Committee. Consequently, I have had an opportunity to see firsthand how science and public policy can sometimes be at odds.

During a Science Committee markup of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Act (HR 5450), an amendment offered by Congressman Miller would have provided guidance on how science should be factored into the development of policy. The amendment contained language (1) to prohibit federal employees from tampering with or censoring federally funded research contrary to policy, (2) to prohibit supervisors from threatening or taking action against an employee who may be developing or disseminating scientific information contrary to policy, and (3) to ensure that appointments to scientific advisory committees he made without regard to political affiliation. The amendment failed to be adopted in Committee, in a vote that was split along party lines.

Being interested in understanding the relationship between science and public policy development, I found it somewhat disheartening to see this reluctance to clarify how science should be considered as an underlying component of policy.

I leave it to each of you to reach your own conclusions on how science may or may not be factored into the development of national policy. For example, climate change and a national energy strategy are current topics that some of you might find interesting to debate from the perspective of how science is being considered in shaping public policy.

Global War on Terror

Throughout this year, the global war on terror (GWOT) has played a significant role in setting the legislative agenda. A week rarely goes by in which activity on the House floor does not have some linkage back to the GWOT. Examples include the following items: efforts to amend appropriation bills to prohibit the use of funds for the establishment of permanent bases in Iraq, language in bills seeking reports on reconstruction costs, supplemental appropriations bills, resolutions on exit strategies, concern over detainee abuse allegations, “eavesdropping” activity, data mining of telephone records, and monitoring of financial transactions.

A search for key word “Iraq” on the Thomas Web page reveals no fewer than 336 bills introduced in the 109th Congress. As the mid-term November elections approach, I expect that the GWOT will continue to consume the legislative calendar not only of those currently in office but also those challenging an incumbent.

Theft of Personal Data

In the spring report I mentioned how quickly legislation can arise from current events. In February it was the Dubai Ports acquisition that resulted in numerous pieces of legislation and Congressional hearings. This quarter it has been the theft of sensitive personal information of millions of veterans, service members, and reservists that resided on a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) laptop and hard drive stolen from an employee’s home May 2006.

On June 28, the FBI issued a statement that the stolen equipment had been recovered after being turned into the FBI’s Baltimore field office by an unnamed individual. Initial analysis by the FBI indicates that the data is intact and appears not to have been accessed.

Although this particular incident may
not have resulted in the disclosure of sensitive personal information, it clearly has pointed out deficiencies in how the VA is handling sensitive personal information. And Congress has been quick to draft legislation to address this situation.

The Comprehensive Veterans’ Data Protection and Identity Protection Act of 2006 is one such bill. This proposal would require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to protect sensitive personal information of veterans. The bill also would provide free credit monitoring for veterans and others whose financial affairs could potentially be adversely affected by such thefts in cases where that information may have been accessed. Although the legislation has not yet made it to the House floor, I am still impressed with how quickly legislation can be drafted in reaction to public outcries.

Telecommunications and “Net Neutrality”
In March of this year one of the other legislative assistants in Congressman Miller’s office departed. As a result, some of the issues areas were shuffled around to fill the void, and I took on a few additional tasks, including all of the judiciary activity, international trade issues, and telecommunications legislation.

This last category of new responsibilities got my attention in early June with House floor debate of the Communications Opportunity, Promotion and Enhancement (COPE) Act. Among other things, this legislation amends the Communications Act of 1934 to create a process for granting a national franchise that would give cable operators the authority to provide cable service in a franchise area. The purpose of this legislation is to foster competitive entry into the cable television market by creating a streamlined franchising process that new entrants could employ as an alternative to the current process of negotiating for franchise authority with potentially thousands of local jurisdictions.

A term that has emerged from this debate is “net neutrality.” Although no single accepted definition exists for the term, most agree that the principle behind “net neutrality” is that owners of the underlying Internet infrastructure should not control how consumers lawfully use the network, nor should they be able to discriminate against content providers’ access to the network. What I found interesting in all of the television ads, newsprint articles, and lobby activity leading up to the vote on passage was that both sides of the debate were characterizing their desired vote (either a yea or a nay for the bill) as supporting the concept of net neutrality. The bill did pass, but a number of amendments which would have strengthened the traditional concept of net neutrality were not incorporated.

Closing Remark
This has been a busy year but I have still been able to find time to participate as one of the “senior” members of the North Carolina delegation’s softball team (“The Moonshiners”). When the year is over and I find myself looking back, it will be the people with whom I have worked with that I will miss most.

I have very much appreciated being a member of Congressman Miller’s staff. He is a very good man and the people of North Carolina who have him as their representative should be proud of his service. I know I am proud to have served him.

This congressional fellowship has been a tremendous experience, and I thank the Institute of Navigation for providing me with this opportunity. I highly recommend anyone interested in seeing Congress first-hand to apply for this program.

— Doug Taggart, a senior systems engineer from Overlook Systems Technologies, Inc., is the ION Congressional Fellow serving in the office of Congressman Brad Miller (North Carolina, 13th District). ◆

Fellow Nominations Requested
Nominations for ION® fellows may be submitted by currently active Institute of Navigation members. All nominations must conform to ION® nomination guidelines as outlined on the nomination form. Nominations must include a brief biography and proposed citation.

Details of the nomination process and forms are available at www.ion.org. Nominations must be received by December 1, 2006, to qualify.

Election to Fellow membership recognizes the distinguished contribution of ION® members to the advancement of the technology, management, practice and teaching of the arts and sciences of navigation, and/or for lifetime contributions to the Institute.

Former members of the ION® who are not currently active members of the organization may be elected to non-voting Fellow membership. A limited number of individuals may be accepted as posthumous Fellow members.

Election to Honorary Fellow membership is authorized for non-members of the Institute of Navigation who are qualified by their accomplishments for recognition as a non-voting Fellow member. Members of other national institutes of navigation are also considered in this category.

Kindly address any correspondence to Fellow Selection Committee, The Institute of Navigation, 3975 University Drive, Suite 390, Fairfax, VA 22030, fax: 703-383-9689, e-mail: mlewis@ion.org.