

A Whole New World: The Transition to a Virtual Legislature

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As we all became quite familiar with the mute button, as well as recognizing when someone's lips were moving without sound, and with getting extremely comfortable with saying, 'Ah, I think you're on mute,' we've all, interns and members alike, had to navigate these new waters and get a custom to this new format. We were all in the same boat together. I believe these common struggles and challenges to this very unique year, brought a certain comradery to the whole legislature that will go down in infamy, as being the year of the Zoom.

This new format, even though challenging, brought a lot of benefits too. Introductions and networking were a lot harder and required much more intent but, once that bond was made, it had significantly more strength because of all the extra energy that went into it.

Us as interns had to be extra creative to find ways to socialize. Some created zoom clubs like book club. Other's utilized Snapchat and Instagram. And we even had weekly poker night. Leo, Colleen, Danielle, and Louis provided so many fantastic opportunities for us as a cohort to bond, with check-ins, legislative educational presentations, and my favorite, Here's the Scoop, where every intern had a chance to share their story with the cohort. This became a time where I most look forward to in the week, because of all the intern's genuine vulnerability with opening up to us, it allowed all of us to identify to each other with common struggles and challenges that we faced to get to the place we are now, that has allowed us to really connect on a deeper level.

As I have gone through this program, I have learned so much about the legislative process, public service, and new things about myself that I haven't known before. Leo often asks us about the time when it clicked for us, meaning having a type of epiphany. It clicked for me after a 30-minute turned hour long conversation with my representative about education. During that conversation, I realized the gravity of where I was working and how I got here with the help of so many others advocating for my needs during K-12 and how so many others with positions similar to mine didn't or don't have the same champions as I have. This ignited a fire and a passion within me now to turn around and be a champion for my community and for those who haven't enjoyed the same type of advocacy as I did growing up. That was when it clicked for me. And that is the beauty of this program, it allows you to see stuff you never knew was there.

And just some final words. I really want to recognize all the program administrators, Colleen and Louis. Leo and Danielle. It is because of them that this program has been so successful this year in this virtual format. They had to navigate a whole new world and they did it with such grace, passion, and heart. I was scared that I was going to miss out on some critical aspects of the program because it was virtual, but that couldn't be further from the truth, and it was due to all the hard work those four put into creating this experience.