

Journalism and Politics

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I'm a senior at Western Washington University, double majoring in journalism and political science. My talk today will focus on the difference between my two majors, comparing and contrasting the experiences of a political staffer, and reporter. I've interned on a small town weekly newspaper, and I've interned in the Washington Senate. Here are a few things I've learned, and a few differences I've noticed.

- It's much easier to get a call back when you're calling from a senator's office. I've called the same exact agency wearing my journalist hat and my senator-staffer hat. And it's not even close.
- Caffeine never goes out of style.
- Don't wear white dress shirts while eating spaghetti.
- I've also noticed people in both fields care deeply about public service. Elected officials and newspapers really care about the constituencies they represent.
- I've deciphered the handwritten hieroglyphics of a constituent letter, and I've written a 2000 word article on seagulls.
- And neither of these tasks was trivial, because getting that response from your senator and reading about all that bird poop mattered to people.
- There's a lot of noise out there about how the media is elitist, or the politicians indifferent.
- And I can't speak for the federal level. But here in Olympia I've watched Senators take time out of their day to listen to a young couple who were having trouble make their rent payments.
- I've seen journalists spend hours trying to verify one quote, because they didn't want to misrepresent someone.

What I'm trying to say -- and one of the things I'm grateful to this internship for teaching me -- is that it's easy to disparage the politicians, or the media. And sure, some of them deserve it. But mostly, they're people. People driven to help other people. And I think it helps to take a step back from whatever is infuriating us at this particular moment and remember that.