

Greetings. My name is Lynnel Ruckert. I spent fifteen years in Washington, D.C. before returning home to Louisiana. It was an honor of a lifetime to serve in the House of Representatives as a Staff Assistant, Scheduler, Administrative Director, Legislative Assistant, Deputy Chief of Staff and; finally, as a Chief of Staff for eight years. On behalf of the thousands of House staffers working today and the legions of Capitol Hill alumni, I thank Chairman Kilmer and Vice Chair Timmons and the entire committee and staff for your efforts to strengthen the institution we love.

Nearly everyone that works on the Hill moved to Washington, D.C. to make a difference. Staffers work long hours in a fast-paced environment while sharing crowded office space. The phones, emails, research and memos are endless while the pay is less than the private sector and the cost of living in Washington is high. Since Congressional members are up for election every two years, the lack of job security adds to the high stress environment. Staffers dedication to the greater good should be rewarded with compensation and benefits competitive with the private and public sector.

I will never forget my first business card with the congressional seal; but, the seal does not pay the rent. Paid parking, metro reimbursement, student loan repayment program, increased choice of on campus eateries, and the Thrift Savings Plan are positive aspects of Capitol Hill life. Some ideas the committee has discussed to further enhance the employee experience, and which I endorse, are:

- Consider an optional bi-monthly payment system. The current monthly payment system can be difficult to manage when living paycheck to paycheck.
- A floor salary and pay-bans for each position would be helpful to recruit broad talent from varied backgrounds that are not dependent on supplemental dollars from home.
- A Human Resources department that provides training to develop and retain staff.
- Promote bipartisan events for staff to mingle.
- Give recognition for years of service. (pin, keychain, certificate, or something visible).
- Allow for flexible work schedules during District work periods.

As important as the institutional support provided to staff is the support provided in individual offices by the Member and the staff who manage them. A positive office culture that invests in and promotes mentorship and the professional

development of staff is essential. Those who manage congressional staff have the opportunity to “make or break” their staff’s congressional experience, and this committee can help promote and strengthen the support for building positive office culture, which will help retain staff and enrich their experience.

In 2008, when Congressman Steve Scalise was first elected, he told me, “Whatever this camaraderie thing you have going...I like it-keep it up.” He realized that being a part of something greater than yourself is a motivator. Although constrained by budget and square footage, many Chiefs of Staffs find creative ways to motivate and incentivize workers. Starting Monday mornings with team meeting where we review the upcoming week's schedule and hear status updates on projects. On Fridays, there was “Idea Lab” where the entire staff looked at the month ahead to brainstorm on how we could maximize the office meetings, floor and committee agendas to connect with constituents in the district. Having the entire staff participate gave junior staff an opportunity to learn about the different tracks in the office...administrative, legislative, communications. A mentorship type philosophy is a great benefit to the individual staff and the institution.

It’s possible to incentivize junior staffers with exposure by:

- Sending a press release to their hometown paper, college newspaper and the Capitol Hill papers announcing they have landed a job on Capitol Hill. And posting these items on social media platforms.
- Providing opportunities to staff the boss for meetings and events.
- Sending them to training to learn about issues and expand their knowledge base.
- Give them an opportunity to travel to the district to meet with real people that are affected by the work done by the staffers.
- Establish a speaker’s series for new staffers on how to setup for success on Capitol Hill and beyond.

It is also critical that we find a way to retain staff longer. The knowledge they cultivate over the years is a great benefit to the Members and constituents. Here are some ideas to retain senior staff:

- Establish an in House credential-training program perhaps aligned with a school to grant MA degree in congressional operations or policy.
- Reward tenured staff with bonus pay for years served.
- Allocate premier parking spots for longevity as incentive to stay
- Allow time off for deeper professional development experiences off campus

- Encouraging senior staff to promote opportunities for staff with shared experiences to gather after the last vote of the week (ex: bipartisan women chiefs group, Agriculture LDs, etc).
- Recognizing staff who are mentors to younger staff or staff with shared affinities through a more formal and less ad hoc recognition process,

The institution of Capitol Hill is unique and offers endless possibilities. As a Hill staffer you learn how to work with others to achieve a common goal, how to think proactively and remove obstacles to reach success and time management skills. Hill staffers have the opportunity to gain ‘polish’, which sets you apart from others. We also all have the opportunity to be part of something larger than ourselves; and the most successful offices not only pay staff well, but have a culture that communicates the degree to which you are part of something special on a regular basis, so that you want to stay and continue to be part of it..

Once you gain success on Capitol Hill, you can achieve anything. My former officemates have gone on to become successful lobbyists, campaign staffers, a real estate agent, an attorney, an elected official, a wall street banker, small business owners, and an insurance agent. But they got their start as part of something important here on the Hill with mentors who took the time to invest in them and make them feel valued so that some of what they learned as Hill staffers gave them the confidence to pursue their dreams.

I hope your continued work serving on this committee acts as a turning point where thousands more staff will have a positive experience on this shining city on a hill.