

Viewpoints and Letters to the Editor are published in *Hort*- comments on matters of concern to horticulturists. These are Science to provide members of the American Society for Horticultural Science an opportunity to share their experiences and reflect the views of a majority of the Society's Members.

ASHS on the Hill

L. George Wilson¹

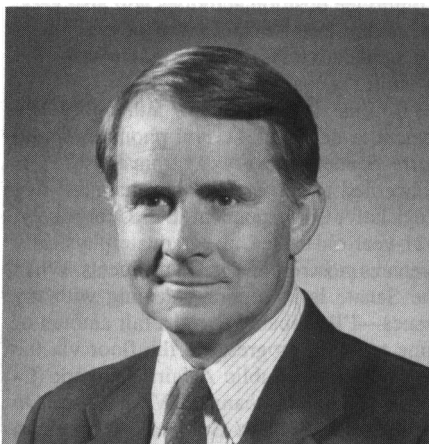
1990-91 ASHS Congressional Science Fellow

Success as a horticultural scientist requires training and dedication to excellence. However, there are many factors besides good science that influence our activities; e.g., the scientific literacy of state and national decisionmakers. The first ASHS Congressional Science Fellow describes impressions of what it's like to operate at the heart of the legislative process in Washington, D.C.

The Congressional Science Fellowship concept is very important to ASHS and certainly deserves to be featured prominently at our Annual Meeting. However, considering the spot I find myself in at this moment-between Dr. Joab Thomas (President of Penn State) and Dr. E.T. York, Jr. [5th William A. (Tex) Frazier Lecturer], two professionals I hold in very high regard-I just may have oversold myself.

Incidentally, I think ASHS President Dick Lower has gotten somewhat carried away with his enthusiasm for the program and has crafted a conspiracy. For example, two of my fellow Congressional Science Fellows are headed to the Univ. of Wisconsin from Capitol Hill. As if that weren't enough, the next ASHS Congressional Fellow is a faculty member from, you guessed it, the Univ. of Wisconsin. Dr. Helen C. Harrison, please stand up and be recognized. Incidentally, Helen has been the ASHS Extension Division Vice President-elect this past year. What I will be sharing with our colleagues today, I think, will mean more to you, Helen, than anyone else. A year from now, you'll know what I mean-sooner than that, I suspect.

In the time I have allocated to me today, I would like, first of all, to "reflect" briefly on the past year, relate some typical Congressional Science Fellow activities, tell you about some of the issues I've been involved with, describe



interactions with other agencies in Washington, and then end with some lessons.

We decided to treat the ASHS Congressional Science Fellowship as a "Position Available" in the Placement Service. So, in case any of you would like to talk with me about becoming a future ASHS Fellow, please make an appointment.

Reflections

When I first learned about the new ASHS Congressional Science Fellowship program, I became captivated with the idea of communicating horticultural and agricultural concepts to those on whom we depend so much for our very existence: policymakers, Congress. In a way, I felt a bit foolish competing for a position that has generally been regarded as a postdoctoral opportunity. While this tradition will probably continue to prevail, I soon learned how much experience is appreciated on Capitol Hill. In fact, several of this year's Fellows are, shall we say, older-like me.

It is in no way a requirement that the ASHS Congressional Science Fellow work for a member of congress from that person's state. However, there certainly are advantages. It is, believe it or not, coincidental that I ended up in Sen. Sanford's office. Soon after arriving on The Hill I had made courtesy visits to members of the North Carolina Congressional

delegation. Because Sen. Sanford was interested in participating in the American Assn. for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Congressional Science and Engineering Fellowship program, and because they knew I was there, and because they knew I knew North Carolina and North Carolina agriculture, plus the fact that I was free, I was asked to interview with them, too. By that time, I had gone through 16 other interviews for possible positions in the House and Senate, on committees, or on personal staffs. I was reluctant to align myself with my home state delegation, because of how it might be interpreted by you, the ASHS membership. Our AAAS and White House advisors, however, put me at ease because of the credentials and reputation of Sen. Sanford. For instance, he was formerly Governor of North Carolina and was the President of Duke Univ. for more than 10 years before coming to Congress as a freshman Senator-at age 69. Incidentally, he is running for reelection next year.

Working as a part of Sen. Sanford's team has been a most positive experience. He is the youngest 73-year-old man I have ever known. He is accessible and respects my opinions and recommendations. I have to remember that it is his power and influence with which I deal every day, not mine. It's only a veneer with which I have been entrusted. I'm still a technocrat, in bureaucrat's clothing, but I have become a part of the Sanford inner circle. Because of Terry Sanford's incredible capacity to deal effectively with so many issues at the same time, and especially his wonderful sense of humor, I will miss working with him. The entertainment value of his staff meetings alone is worth considering extending my stay on The Hill.

Much of what I want to say to you today has already been expressed, in one form or another, in my "Congressional News" columns in the *ASHS Newsletter* during the past 9 months, especially the Dec. 1990 and the June 1991 issues. I remember indicating once that part of our problem stems from the fact that we perpetually preach to the choir-that is, we commiserate continually among ourselves about how poorly we seem to be treated by

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²Senator Terry Sanford's Office, 716 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, DC 20510. Current address: USAID, Unit 3760, APO AA 34031

those who hold the purse strings, starting with Congress. In many ways, mostly just by being a part of the legislative system, I think that, as your Congressional Science Fellow, I have been "preaching to a new choir." That, in itself, means that I have generally been speaking in a different dialect—an important component of being understood by a new set of peers. Back in November, I realized that I was starting to understand what people on The Hill were saying. It was kind of scary. Remember, these people are mostly political scientists and lawyers who are very bright and capable, but basically scientific and agricultural illiterates. While I have contributed to their understanding of these issues, I hope I have also contributed to your political literacy.

When I signed my contract with ASHS, we were still basking in the demise of communism, including the tearing down of the Berlin Wall, and a general feeling of world peacefulness. Then, on 2 Aug., Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, and Operation Desert Shield was initiated. By the time I got to Washington, just after Labor Day, troop buildups were beginning to affect all of our families.

During our AAAS orientation, budget debates and sequestration were the talk of the town. The ultimate budget resolution—the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (Law), or OBRA—has continued to affect all of our programs. The 1990 Farm Bill was keeping a lot of Congressmen and their staffers very busy. Kathleen Merrigan, a Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee staffer, spoke at the 1990 ASHS Annual Meeting in Tucson about details of the Research Title.

On 16 Jan., Operation Desert Storm began, and dominated our lives. For us, it was generally business as usual, except that security on Capitol Hill was tightened considerably. In fact, friends of ours from the Boston area, who had planned to visit while we were in the Capitol, stayed away because they felt that Washington, D.C., was a dangerous place to be. Hmmmmm.

On 6 Mar., after Desert Storm was over, I was given a gallery pass and joined with the Senators, Congressmen, Cabinet members, foreign ambassadors, and other Hill staffers at the joint session of Congress to hear President Bush's address. As many of you may recall, it was sort of a second "State of the Union," or "State of the World" message. For me, it was my first invitation to a joint session of Congress. I hope I never get too old or "experienced" to be thrilled by such an event.

I spent the April Congressional recess in Central America with Sen. Sanford. I described my role in the development and execution of his Business Development Mission for North Carolina business people in my May 1991 ASHS Newsletter column. Shortly after our return to Washington, one of those we visited on the trip, Nicaragua's President Violeta Chamorro, addressed another Joint Session of Congress. Again, I was privileged to be in the

gallery. Another rich memory.

Typical activities

A "typical" day for me this past year started out with a look at the Washington Post: a) the Congressional Calendar-for committee activities either in the Senate or the House that I should attend; and b) for news items, especially in my areas of responsibility. I usually skim the former, over breakfast, for any schedule adjustments I might need to make, and read the latter on the Metro during the trip from my apartment in Alexandria to my office in the Senate. This is one aspect of keeping up.

From here on, remember that I have been working on a personal staff in the Senate. House staff activities may vary somewhat. Committee position activities will also vary. In January, Sen. Sanford asked me to be one of his Legislative Assistants. There went my spectator status!

Routine is nonexistent, although I can expect to deal with several phone calls and correspondences every day from constituents concerned about issues that I handle. My Legislative Correspondent (LC), George Ivey, a 21-year-old Duke Univ. graduate, physically prepares most responses to constituents. When the Senate is in session—dealing with my issues—I'll probably spend a fair amount of time tracking progress on the floor via the Cable Satellite Public Affairs Network (C-SPAN) television channel. When it's time to vote, I will brief Sen. Sanford and help him decide how he should vote. Sometimes, it's "walk and talk," on the way to the floor. I often host visits by constituents or special interest groups who wish to express their views to the Senator (they may or may not get to see him).

I can plan on spending time researching issues through the Congressional Research Service (CRS) of the Library of Congress, often electronically, and/or by phoning or faxing networks of contacts in Congress, all over Washington and around the country, as many of you can attest. Information is often needed quickly. I frequently collaborate on issues of mutual concern with colleagues on Sen. Sanford's staff (my work area is right in the middle of things, with very little privacy), plus those from other Senate and House personal offices and committees. I really do operate at the heart of the legislative process. Last week, at the AAAS retreat for Congressional Fellows, I heard a senator referred to as a "constitutional impediment." Seven of us Fellows who come from agriculturally oriented fields make up what we call the "Ag Caucus." We consult with each other frequently on issues of mutual concern. I often attend hearings on The Hill and other meetings around town, at other agencies, pertaining to my work. I constantly use the office computer system and personal computer in my apartment (via modem) to prepare reports and other documents, and exchange electronic messages

(E-Mail) with other staffers.

Responsiveness is the key, so I can expect to change issues several times a day. Never a dull moment! Activities become very intense, and emotional swings are sometimes very wide. Long days are commonplace, especially when the Senate is in session. In fact, two key pieces of legislation that I've been involved with are finally being dealt with; a good time, or a bad time, to be gone, depending on one's perspective.

I keep referring to Washington, D.C., as a small town. A recent column in the *Washington Post* reinforced this. Sooner or later, it seems, nearly everyone comes to the capitol for one reason or another. You really never know whom you're going to see, or when, or where.

As I wind down my year on The Hill, I feel like I'm holding down at least three different jobs: a) Senate Legislative Assistant; b) ASHS Congressional Science Fellow; and c) North Carolina State Univ. Professor.

Issues

I was raised on a fruit, vegetable, and dairy farm along the shores of Lake Ontario in New York, but since I left the farm, I have successfully avoided anything to do with dairy issues, until I got to Washington. In fact, part of the reason I left the farm was because of the cows. In the words of one of my colleagues on Capitol Hill who also knows about dairy farming intimately, "No matter how bad things get in Washington, D.C., it's never as bad as milking cows."

This spring, when low milk prices began forcing North Carolina dairy farmers out of business, I started receiving a lot of calls. After studying the situation, I ultimately recommended that Sen. Sanford vote in favor of Sen. Leahy's emergency milk management amendment to an appropriations bill. It was not an especially good plan, but it was the best compromise we could come up with at that time. Throughout the deliberations I consulted extensively with my colleague at NCSU, the Dairy Management Extension Economist, my brother Bill (a dairy farmer in western New York), and others. Our North Carolina dairy farmers would have received more than \$1/cwt more for their milk had this amendment passed. However, they and their processors were upset because of the national pooling feature of the legislation, which would have favored dairy farmers in Wisconsin and Minnesota. Tomorrow, a new dairy bill will be introduced in the Senate. We are not 100% pleased with it, but will be cosponsors, for political reasons, which often displace substance.

Why am I telling you horticulturists about a dairy issue? Because it illustrates a typical learning experience about the political process and dealing with constituents. Furthermore, it illustrates the influence of constituents on their elected officials. I had no idea how responsive Members were to letters and phone

calls from the folks in the state. I know from experience that every letter, however sophisticated or humble, is responded to in a timely fashion.

Involvement of someone like you or me in such agricultural issues also provides opportunities to contribute to the agricultural and/or scientific literacy of fellow staffers. Most Hill staffers, of necessity, rely extensively on the CRS. Believe me, I will miss CRS! I use this tremendous resource extensively just like everyone else, but am often able to relate on a par with the CRS experts—something they welcome and find refreshing too.

I've learned a lot about dimensions of agriculture that I normally leave to others. For instance, this spring our U.S. International Trade Commission recommended the importation of an additional 300 million lb of peanuts because of a poor 1990 U.S. harvest in the southeast. In response, those of us Agricultural Legislative Assistants from the peanut-producing states organized a written objection to President Bush. During that period, I was contacted by many North Carolina peanut producers and shellers, plus the Executive Director of the North Carolina Peanut Producers Assn. Over the 4th of July, President Bush approved a politically motivated compromise importation of 100 million lb.

An opportunity to defend a horticulturally important issue came in the form of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) Honey Program. Basically, the existence and continuation of this loan program for beekeepers were being challenged in Congress this spring. The amendment was defeated in the end by providing evidence of this program's importance to horticultural crop productivity and profitability. Honeybees, as we all know, are the major pollinators of dozens of crops, valued annually at more than \$6 billion in the United States alone. The cost of the program to the government is less than \$50 million/year, a fraction of its total value. Incidentally, in the process of doing my homework, I learned that North Carolina ranks first in the number of beekeepers, mostly hobbyists.

Recently, I attended a hearing on the Research Title conducted by Sen. Tom Daschle and his Agricultural Research and General Legislation Subcommittee of the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee. U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Assistant Secretary for Science and Education, and a past President of ASHS, Charles E. Hess, and his administrators were the main attraction. The theme? Accountability and relating to nonscientists and policymakers. A key issue was the Competitive Grants component of the National Research Initiative, which I addressed in my Aug. 1991 column. For instance, the House has recommended \$99 million for 1992, compared with \$73 million funded for fiscal

1991. Incidentally, more than 2700 research proposals were received last year. Federal funding, clearly, is not an entitlement. Applicants for grants will be expected to develop matching funds from nonfederal sources. Another issue addressed in this hearing was the importance of linkages and interactions between research and extension.

Lessons learned: Take-home messages

A German economist speaking to the Press Club in November referred to our Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act as "the best the political process could deliver—that is the definition of democracy."

It's very easy to become cynical about Washington, Congress, the Administration, etc., etc. I fight cynicism, because I think it's negative and counterproductive. In Washington, you must be positive. In fact, I think my best attribute over this past year has been a good sense of humor.

It's easy to become deluded about the power with which you deal, even in a temporary position like a Congressional Fellow. I have to keep reminding myself that it is Terry Sanford's name, influence, power, etc., that opens the doors for George Wilson. As I said earlier, it is a veneer that the real George Wilson wears while I'm your ASHS Congressional Science Fellow.

We've got to be involved; we must use our information and contacts. Congress will make decisions about science, whether we are involved or not. We can't just go on listening. It's time to be more assertive. We need to form cooperative alliances in agriculture, develop a consensus, and present a clear, unified message to Congress.

We've got to communicate with non-horticulturists, and with nonagriculturists, on *their* terms.

This I can't resist. How many of you read "The Mini Page?" You know, that 11 x 14-inch, four-page, cartoon-like insert in your Sunday paper. It's for the kids. Right? So most of us who don't have little kids around the house probably ignore it. Me, too, unfortunately. However, I did notice a couple issues recently that hit home. Author Betty Debnam did two excellent pieces, "Pollination," tying honeybees directly into the productivity and profitability of horticultural crops, and "To Be A Honeybee." She credits U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, university, and other information sources, probably some of you. Seeing these articles makes me think maybe we should be channeling more information, in brief, clear message form, through The Mini Pages of the world. Apparently, Universal Press Syndicate finds it worthwhile, because The Mini Page has been around since my kids were munchkins; they're all in college now.

I'm not suggesting that we abandon the

Journal of American Society for Horticultural Science, HortScience, or any other refereed publications that are so important to our profession. I am suggesting that we should wake up, and recognize that we cannot afford the luxury of only writing for refereed publications. It's our own fault that most people do not respect horticulture as a science. What have we done lately to relate to the general public in an appropriate and meaningful way? Our new HortTechnology, the Journal of Production Agriculture, and the Council for Agricultural Science and Technology publications do a good job of addressing fairly sophisticated audiences. However, we need to look for other "teachable moments" and create opportunities to tell the public about some of the important and interesting realities of horticultural science. Our future depends on it. By the way, I hope the press corps is well-represented here today. More important, I hope that any of you who are asked to talk about your work will not be shy. When you get such opportunities, use brief and clear explanations that will make good "sound bites for the 6 o'clock news."

The bottom line on being a Congressional Science Fellow

As with so many opportunities in life, it is what you make it. Each Fellow designs or creates his or her own experience. Helen, you are going to Washington in the middle of the 102nd Congress. Therefore, there should be fewer changes, which should make it easier for you to get established. As I pointed out in my Aug. 1991 ASHS Newsletter column, working in the U.S. Congress is very much like blind people describing an elephant. It depends on where you are in relation to the beast. Some, of course, prefer to stay as far away as possible. It is not something I would recommend to all of you. However, for those who are looking for a truly unique experience as a horticultural scientist, the AAAS Congressional Science & Engineering Fellow program, of which ASHS is a part, is highly respected in Washington. I challenge you to spend a year as a part of it on Capitol Hill.

My future involvement as a former ASHS Congressional Science Fellow depends a lot on you. I hope you will be interested in knowing more about my activities in Washington and take advantage of me, and Helen Harrison. One good way to do so might be to have us participate in your regional ASHS meetings—to enlighten your colleagues about the concept and value of having "ASHS on The Hill."

Finally, the value of face-to-face contact cannot be overstated. I encourage all of you to visit with your senators and representatives, in Washington and in your state. They need you, and you need them.