

Often timing is everything. For AAAS Science & Technology Policy Fellows **Ali Nouri** and **Ben Zaitchik**, their fellowships began as climate issues rose to the top of the political agenda.

Ali Nouri, who has a PhD in molecular biology from Princeton University, accepted a placement as a AAAS Congressional Fellow in the Office of Senator James Webb (D-VA), and the timing couldn't have been better. Shortly after arriving, Ali was asked to take the lead on climate and energy issues in his office. "I got lucky," he explains. "And I had to learn quickly. It is amazing how much you learn by doing."

Ali prepared Senator Webb for hearings by providing information he needed on topics he wanted to know more about, including carbon dioxide sequestration and biofuels. "The fellowship is an amazing program," he says. "It puts you in the heart of the action."

Ali knew from an early age that he wanted to do international policy work. Originally from Iran, Ali moved with his family to Oregon when he was 11 years old. Political turmoil shaped his childhood and the way he saw the world. "Politics changed the lives of my family and the people we knew," he says. "I had more and more desire to do work beyond the microscope." He applied for the Congressional Fellowship because of the breadth of issues he'd be working on. "I wanted a birds-eye view and to work with a broad range of issues.

"I found a lot of respect for science and scientific consensus in my office. But having scientific 'truth' is only one component. You need to have other interest groups come together with scientists and build coalitions with industry, experts and citizens," Ali says. "Scientists can have powerful voices, but there are other voices. If they are not colliding, it makes creating policy easier."

Following his fellowship year, Ali accepted a position as a legislative assistant in Senator Webb's office, to further hone his policy skills. "The pace on the Hill has been really surprising. It is exactly the opposite

of academia where you spend years learning about topics—here you have just hours or even minutes."

Although Ben Zaitchik had fellowship placement offers elsewhere, he chose the Office of Global Change at the Department of State because of the global importance of climate issues today. "It has been a very exciting year. I believe climate is the most urgent and pressing issue we face—one where we need to make progress."

Because of the current high profile status of climate change, Ben, who has a PhD in climate science from Yale University, had opportunities to use his expertise to prepare climate science briefing materials. He also served as a primary negotiator on other topics including biofuels and bioenergy. "I worked on issues such as verifying compliance," he explains. "And I negotiated on agendas that require scientific expertise. People were very receptive to the ideas and insights I provided."

He attended the climate change talks in Bonn, Germany, in preparation for the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark in December 2009. "On climate, the U.S. is not the greenest player in the room," says Ben. "But I am more sympathetic to differences in national circumstances. We are more carbon intensive and so we have different proposals."

Ben returned to academia in 2010, as an assistant professor in the Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences at Johns Hopkins University. "The fellowship will inform my teaching and research," says Ben. "As a teacher and mentor it will be invaluable."

When **Lekelia "Kiki" Jenkins** applied for the AAAS Fellowship, she knew she wanted to serve at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The only problem was NOAA had never hosted a AAAS Fellow before.

Kiki, who has a PhD in marine conservation from Duke University, spoke with several officials at NOAA about the benefits of hosting S&T Policy Fellows in their offices. "When they decided to host for the first time, I just kept my fingers crossed that they would think I was qualified," she says.

They did, and for two years Kiki was at the National Marine Fisheries Service in the Office of International Affairs, where her responsibilities included serving as the staff lead for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization (NAFO). Her expertise and experience put her in a good position to address conservation-based regulations.

She believes her most profound contribution has been her work related to the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Kiki's efforts focused on a petition by non-governmental organizations that calls for the banning of swordfish imports from countries without adequate marine mammal protection measures in swordfish fisheries. "As a AAAS Fellow and not a federal employee, I felt I had more liberty to suggest and pursue a wider scope of options in considering the petition," she explains.

Kiki is now a David H. Smith Conservation Research Fellow at the University of Washington in Seattle. "My post-doc is based in large part on what I learned in the AAAS Fellowship," she says. Her experience at NOAA will also affect her future research. "It has changed my perspective on the kind of scientific work that I do. Instead of being reactive, I'll be able to look ahead, stay more current, and anticipate where the policy needs are."

Joyce Yang, who has a PhD in genetics and microbiology from MIT, has a passion for biofuels. She is thrilled about her placement in the Office of Biomass Programs at Department of Energy (DOE). "I had wanted to work in renewable energy and contribute to the field of biofuels since graduate school," she says. When she heard about the S&T Policy Fellowships from a former AAAS Fellow, she knew it would be a great opportunity. "It has been exactly what I hoped for."

At DOE, Joyce has worked on the use of algae as a viable alternative fuel source. "I'm in a program office and at this level I am very close to the science," she says. "I collect data and present recommendations to management on how to affect technological barriers."

Joyce also served as co-chair for the private-public partnership section of a workshop on the National

Algal Biofuels Technology Roadmap, which brought together experts from industry and major fuel producers. "The idea is to put together a roadmap of technological barriers," she says. "These include challenges like growing algae on a very large scale or developing the workforce that will be needed to produce these biofuels."

Joyce renewed her fellowship for a second year, and although she is uncertain about her future, she is confident that her experience at DOE has taken her in a new direction. "A lot of us who try a AAAS Fellowship have interests outside of academia and are open to a non-traditional route," says Joyce. "I've had fun doing research, but didn't feel I was as influential as I could be. Using science to inform policy is very gratifying."

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