

## MELANIE ROBERTS

2005-06 AAAS Congressional Fellow, Office of Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM)

2007-08 AAAS Fellow at the National Science Foundation  
Directorate for Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences

Unlike a lot of teenagers, Melanie Roberts knew exactly what she wanted to study in college: neuroscience. What she was less certain of was the career options her major could lead to. During the second year of her PhD program in neurobiology at the University of Washington in Seattle, a project involving stem cells roused Melanie's interest in science policy and bioethics. So she invited Mark Frankel, director of the AAAS Scientific Freedom, Responsibility and Law Program, to talk to her and her colleagues about careers in science policy. When he informed the group of the AAAS Science & Technology Policy Fellowships, Melanie knew it was the perfect opportunity for her. She stayed involved in science policy through the remainder of graduate school and applied immediately after graduating in December 2006.

Melanie was offered a AAAS Congressional Fellowship and chose to spend her year in the office of Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), who chairs the Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

The experience was an eye-opener. She worked on the America COMPETES Act, a bipartisan bill that was recently signed into law by President George W. Bush, which increases funding for research and improves science and math education in schools. Melanie also served as the lead staffer for Senator Bingaman on the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, for which she wrote speeches, helped draft legislation, and advised the senator on issues such as tobacco regulation, stem cells, and health disparities. Another significant project was her collaboration with other offices to restore the Office of Technology Assessment, which lost its funding in 1995 after providing scientific and technical analysis for members of Congress and congressional committees for nearly 25 years. Those efforts are being continued by colleagues in Bingaman's office.

But her learning experience isn't over yet. Melanie applied for a second fellowship opportunity; she is now a 2007-08 AAAS Science & Technology Policy Fellow at the National Science Foundation's Directorate for Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences. There, she is concentrating on research about the development and use of science and technology, particularly in an international context. She also is gaining a better understanding of how government organizations make decisions about the research funding that is allocated by Congress. "It's certainly interesting to see how stakeholders influence funding priorities, and in turn, how agencies attempt to meet congressional mandates within the system of peer-reviewed science," she says.

Melanie plans to pursue an academic career in science and technology studies. "I'm interested in studying the system of science and better applying the knowledge that's generated in academic institutions to societal needs and policy decisions," she explains. "In order to improve the system, I need to understand it more fully."

