

Tuesday, January 9, 2007

After a grueling series of meetings with Chinese officials in Beijing and Shanghai to discuss energy security and military issues, my plane finally arrived at an Air Force base in Seattle. The moment the wheels touched-down, my Blackberry buzzed with the news that the soon-to-be Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, requested that I call her.

Weeks earlier, I had requested a seat on the powerful House Appropriations Committee, which is responsible for federal spending decisions. After years of reckless spending in Congress that has turned our record surplus into a record-high deficit, it will be the Appropriations Committee that restores fiscal responsibility and determines federal spending.

Because the competition to secure a spot on the Appropriations Committee is so fierce, it is one of the few “exclusive” committees in the House—meaning that members must give up all other Committee assignments to serve. When I requested a seat, I was told it would be the longest of long-shots. First, there were more senior Members of the House who desired a seat and second, because there were already three New York Democrats on the Committee (Reps. Serrano, Hinchey and Lowey) and a fourth would be unprecedented.

Speaker Pelosi’s phone call changed that: “I’m going to try to put you on Appropriations. Do you really want it?”

My plane may have landed, but I was soaring.

At 3:30 the next morning, I awoke in Seattle and boarded an Air-Force plane for Andrews Air Force Base. We landed at about 1 pm, and one hour after dragging my jet-lagged and weary body to the Cannon House Office Building, the full Democratic Caucus voted to appoint me to the Committee.

The next step was determining which subcommittees on which to serve. Democrats and

Republicans use the same rules to govern the selection: a “round-robin” based on seniority. We gathered in a room, in front of a massive chart of Subcommittees and the number of vacant seats on each. There are thirty-seven Democratic Members and twelve subcommittees. Each Member selects at least two subcommittees and the selection is made by seniority order. This means that the lower you are on the seniority list, the less likely it will be to receive your first pick.

Despite this, I am happy to report that I landed on two of my top choices:

Since my top priority in Congress is reducing our dependence on foreign oil, I secured a seat on the Energy and Water Subcommittee. This subcommittee not only has jurisdiction for all Department of Energy programs, but also for Long Island’s important Army Corps of Engineers projects (from Woodbine Avenue in Northport to Brown’s Creek dredging in Sayville to the Fire Island Reformulation program). I hope to focus on increasing investment in renewable energy research and development as an alternative to the huge giveaways to Big Oil that perpetuate our reliance on fossil fuels. I also plan on continuing my leadership on environmental investments to improve Long Island’s quality of life.

I also secured a spot on the Foreign Operations Subcommittee. Here, I intend to advocate for more oversight of foreign policy programs, a new “Marshall Plan” in the Middle East, and reform of school curricula in countries that receive U.S. foreign assistance. I also hope to have a stronger voice in guiding policy on the genocide in Darfur and continue to play a role in the debate on Iraq and Afghanistan.

Above all, I am eager to work with Speaker Pelosi, Appropriations Committee Chairman David Obey and the new Democratic leadership to restore fiscal responsibility while protecting priorities that matter to Americans. Instead of providing billions in subsidies to Big Oil, I will fight to invest in programs that increase our energy independence, protect our soldiers and veterans, lower the cost of prescription drugs, reform the Alternative Minimum Tax and make college more affordable.

For more information about the House Appropriations Committee, click [here](#) .