

the PAGE LIFE

Junior spends semester working with the government in Washington, D.C.

Awake-up call at 5, doors shut for the first class of the day at 6, work until 1 in the morning, then personal time.

This was junior Maddie Sparks' life as a Senate page. Sparks was chosen from all applicants in Texas for a spot in the Senate Page Program in Washington, D.C., which enabled her to live in the city, assist the senators, meet new friends and experience government life as it truly was.

"At 10, work started," Sparks said. "The 30 of us pages would walk to the Capitol together, hang up our coats and bags in the cloakroom, then start the exciting part of our day — work! Most of our work consisted of running papers throughout the Capitol or serving the senators, whether we were bringing them water or making copies of their speeches."

As a page, Sparks was not supposed to speak to the senators unless they spoke to her first. Sparks' duty was to help out where she could without interfering. However, she did share memorable moments with select senators.

"Senator McConnell and Senator Ayotte decided they wanted to talk to my friend Alex and me," Sparks said. "They apologized jokingly for all the disagreement between parties in the Senate, and we laughed. There is a lot of time spent on trying to pass bills that can't pass because of the disagreement between the parties. Senator McConnell said 'Back in the day, we could all have consensus because we were

allowed to drink on the floor.'"

This experience with the senators allowed Sparks to broaden her opinion and perspective about legislators.

"It may not seem like a big deal, but Alex and I felt so special to be joking with some of the most powerful leaders in the U.S.," Sparks said. "It was cool to see these very important people, who we had seen giving dozens of passionate speeches, just joke and talk with each other about unimportant things. In that moment, I realized that senators aren't superstars or demigods, but regular people who need to relax and have fun every once in a while."

During her time in D.C., Sparks met Vice President Joe Biden, who made an effort to meet all the pages.

"He introduced himself to all of my work shift and shook our hands," Sparks said. "He said, 'Nice to meet you, Maddie from Texas,' after I introduced myself. We were all a little shocked and starstruck."

Sparks said the experience was memorable and helped prepare her for her future.

"I feel so much better about leaving for college because I was far away, I had a stressful schedule, and I had not one, but five, roommates," Sparks said. "I worked 40 hours a week in one of the most beautiful buildings in the world with some of my best friends and I got paid for it! I'm so thankful for the lifelong connections I made in D.C."