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Why apply for an externship in legislative oversight?

Congress and state legislatures have various powers and responsibilities that include legislating, approving and allocating funding, and, in the case of Congress, approving treaties and nominations and declaring war. Legislatures also have the power and responsibility to look at how government programs are working and whether new issues are arising in the private sector that may need legislative attention. This latter responsibility is what we call “oversight,” and it’s when a legislative body looks into the facts of a program or issue, identifies any problems, and makes those problems known in order to help the legislature and the public decide whether government action is required. Sometimes, those who have information the legislature needs come forward readily; in other cases, resistance and even obstruction may require an intensive investigation. Legislative oversight is a challenging and exciting mission with a meaningful public purpose.

The Levin Center at Wayne Law specializes in legislative oversight and offers the opportunity for an externship placement in Washington, D.C., in an oversight committee of Congress. Placements may include the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, currently chaired by Senator Gary Peters of our own state of Michigan, and the House Financial Services Committee, currently chaired by Representative Maxine Waters of California. Other placement options may also become available.

Working with experienced attorneys, students conduct research, draft questions, review and organize documents, draft memos and chronologies, prepare for interviews and hearings, and possibly help draft committee reports. Externs will have an insider’s view of how congressional oversight committees function and gain crucial legal skills.

The U.S. Supreme Court in the 1957 decision in *Watkins v. the United States* wrote:

“The power of Congress to conduct investigations is inherent in the legislative process. That power is broad. It encompasses inquiries concerning the administration of existing laws as well as proposed or possibly needed statutes. It includes surveys of defects in our social, economic or political system for the purpose of enabling Congress to remedy them. It comprehends probes into departments of the Federal Government to expose corruption, inefficiency or waste.”

Serving as a Levin Center Extern exposes Wayne Law students to that profound responsibility.