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(But) as I went overseas (to Hungary), my interest in current affairs of the US grew and after coming back, worked on campaigns of General Wesley Clark and John Kerry and later decided to get a job in the political arena." Today, Mahajan is the person for all media conferences and releases for Congressman Crowley, (D-NJ).

Parag Mehta is another staffer making waves among the Democrats. Mehta is the Director of Training for the Democratic National Committee (DNC). "Part of my job is to travel around the country and train activists and staff for campaigns," says Mehta who is answerable to Dr Howard Dean, Chairman of DNC.

Mehta is part of the "back-to-grassroots" campaign of the DNC initiated under Dr Howard Dean and has made inroads into the Asian-American community by involving younger immigrant as well. Interestingly, while growing up in Odessa, Texas, Mehta too was not very politically inclined but soon was motivated by the "the direction the country was taking" and decided to be active in Democratic Party politics, again getting active during Presidential campaigns in 2004.

Keeping closer to State and local politics are youths like Satinder Malhi, legislative aide to Henry Waxman (D-CA) in Sacramento, and activist Preeti Kulkarni of Los Angeles—both who took advantage of campaign training initiated by the DNC under the leadership of Dr Dean.

Malhi says, "I am the only turbaned staffer in the California Capitol building".

Kulkarni along with upcoming leader Gautam Datta of Southern California, as part of the Asian American Action Fund initiative and others have taken the message of getting electable candidates to heart. Many Indian-Americans have gotten involved in grassroots campaigns to support and organize even non-Indian candidates like John Chiang—"who are the best representative for our views" according to Kulkarni.

Now, with increasing number of high school age and college-bound Indian Americans, many have decided to intern and learn the ropes of the political machinery. One such program, in existence for over 10 years is the Summer Washington Leadership Program (WLP) offered by the Indian American Center for Political Awareness (IACPA), a national, non-profit organization dedicated to increasing the participation of the Indian American community in public policy and the political process.

Since 1994, the WLP has given more than 150 Indian American students the opportunity to intern in Washington, DC, where participants are placed by IACPA in Congressional and other legislative offices. With a well developed program, IACPA also boasts of returning alumni, who after successfully interning have decided to mentor other Indian Americans in learning the ropes of Washington politics and civic participation.

Both these programs are recognized by many legislators as being a good program.

Past programs and events have included meetings with Indian American elected offi-



(top) Assembly member Kumar Barve; Uppendra Chivukula

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cials, Ambassadors and Indian Americans who are working in Congress, the Federal Government and local and state agencies.

The Indian American Foundation for Political Education (IAFPE) is another national organization founded in 1982 with chapters in over 20 states, dedicated to raising political awareness of Indian-Americans. The IAFPE introduced a political internship program, the first one in the country, in 1994 and over 100 college students participated in the Summer Political Internship Program. Similar to the IACPA program, the internship is typically over 8-10 weeks (during summer) in the office of a US congressman, senator or a state legislator, at a government or non-government agency, or with political parties. Another first, IAFPE

also offers 2-4 internships in India starting 2005. The IAFPE is more active in the East Coast of USA.

Attorney Ralph Nurnberger of Georgetown University and an Associate with the IACPA writes that the growth of the Indian American Center for Political Awareness (IACPA) and its Washington Leadership Program (WLP) reflect a similar trend by the entire Indian-American community.

Both IACPA and IAFPE had held various briefing sessions with legislators and lobbyists and visiting dignitaries over the years, often spelling out campaign strategies for Indian-American candidates.

Since "All Politics is Local", as the old saying goes, apart from national organizations like IAFPE and IACPA, there are serious grassroots efforts with more local involvement as well. Individual donors and community leaders have often initiated placements for high school and community members as interns at legislators' offices. This can be seen across the country in numerous offices as well, and are especially encouraged by state assembly members and state senators.

However, most of the interns may not necessarily plan careers in public policy. The internship programs are encouraged and are beneficial to creating public awareness for civics and politics as well as those who may think about eventually running for a public office or working for a branch of the federal or local government.

So numerous youth like Nisha Vasan of Cate High School in Carpentaria, CA (17) have interned with Congressman Brad Sherman (D-CA), while Avni Bhakta (17) of Homestead High School, Meghana Dhar (17), Amita Valliani (17) of Harker School, all look forward to being members of the Youth Commission set up by Congressman Mike Honda (D SJ) - which gives them a taste of organizing meetings, note taking and attending conferences.

Some have taken to getting involved in political campaigns of candidates who share your values and vision. Helping a campaign by walking neighborhoods, stuffing envelopes and other important jobs for the election cycle do not even require a person to be a registered voter or a US Citizen- as many in the Indian-American community have realized.

Pennsylvania native Ro Khanna, who also ran for Congress in 2004, thinks this is a good idea. "This is perhaps the best way for youth from our community to get involved," he says.

"Even during my campaign (in 2004), we had several from the Indian-American community doing the precinct walk, handing out campaign materials etc- that is the way most of us got started."

Referring to the upcoming US-India Civilian Nuclear Agreement in US Congress and Senate, Deven Verma of Los Altos, CA and Co-Chair of US-India Strategic Alliance Committee says, "We have an current issue at hand which has far reaching consequences for both USA and India. We want entire Indian-American community to rally behind it. This is the perfect time and most important for both USA, India and the World".

D.E.S.I. T.A.L.K.



I feel comfortable here in the US, but when I am in India, I feel like I can do anything. I can be completely myself when I am in India. I think I consider myself more as an Indian living in America rather than an Indian American.

—JAYRAM KRISHNAN, 20



What do you mean there is confusion among our rank? There is no such thing. The school which I go to, we Indian Americans rule. Among a lot of things we call Indian, we even call our school J.P. Stevens, the 'John Patel High School'. Want more proof of our dominance?

—RAHUL AGGARWAL, 14



Sometimes it seems as if Indian Americans who have lived all their lives in the US are more traditional than people in India. They go to the temple more and are more proud to be Indians. They wear saris, lehengas, payals and nose rings. That's changed from what it was ten years ago.

—NEHA MALHOTRA, 24

