

As one of the most recent additions to Prime Policy Group, I joined the firm in mid-2015 together with my long-time colleague John Schmitz, to help launch Prime Policy Transatlantic Group. Unlike most of my colleagues at Prime, although I have worked on policy matters in Washington for over 15 years, I have never worked in the US Administration or on Capitol Hill. My path to a public affairs career in Washington started in law school, and on the other side of the Atlantic.

I knew before I started law school that I wanted to work on international matters, and during my studies in Germany sought out opportunities to study abroad (in Spain) and to work as an intern in Washington. One of those Washington internships led to an opportunity to work for a large international law firm. I stayed for more than 8 years, working on international trade and regulatory matters. Much of my work at the time was purely legal, but I realized over time that the most exciting client matters involved a mixture of legal and policy challenges as well as working with stakeholders and coalitions.

At two subsequent law firms, the work my colleague John and I were doing for our clients also focused mostly on policy. Our clients' issues ranged from energy and climate to international trade, technology, pharmaceuticals and financial services. Sometimes the specific matters we were working on made it onto the front pages of the Wall Street Journal, New York Times or Washington Post. We ultimately decided that while we loved being lawyers, our expertise and clients might be an even better fit in a public policy firm like Prime Policy. We have not been disappointed!

My first lesson learned over these years is that there are different paths to arrive at a public policy career in Washington. Mine may not be the most obvious one, but I hope it can show that as long as you pursue your interest in working on policy, it can and will happen. My second lesson is that you probably can't expect to always work on fascinating, front-page policy matters throughout your career. Sometimes there will be clients and assignments that are less interesting if not outright tedious and difficult. It is important to serve those clients with the same dedication and professionalism – even if those projects aren't the ones you proudly mention in your "lessons learned after 15 years" piece.

The third lesson follows straight from the second and may be the most important one for young women in the profession. Ask for the type of work you want to do! Make your preferences clear to your supervisors! Seek out and know the type of clients you want to serve and the issues you want to work on! Women are still less likely to ask for the most interesting assignments and may assume that being a good team player means taking the "bore me to tears" project more often than they would like. Be a team player, but find that right balance and seize the opportunity when the front-page client or matter comes up that you know you want to work on! Ultimately, no one else will form your career for you. That challenge is up to you.