This summer has been a worldwind of learning, traveling, adjusting and readjusting, frustrating conflicts and waited-for resolve, the internet, pages and pages of documents, lunches, breakfasts, a few dinners, the White House, Senator Whitehouse, and frozen yogurt. I learned a huge amount about how to be a good organizer, how to effect change on the highest level, how to celebrate successes and mourn failures. I learned how important it is for those of us in this movement to work together, I learned how to budget my time and how to live in a city that actually never sleeps. In this report I will attempt to provide narration for a summer that definitely changed my life. I will address successes and failures of my internship, issues that I had with the RRASC program and how I think those issues should be solved, and advice for a future intern at MergerWatch. I hope my report will help make this program stronger and more efficient and I hope my stories will illuminate some of the problems facing the reproductive justice movement.

I applied to the Reproductive Rights Activist Service Corps because I believe in fighting for the reproductive freedom of choice for every person in the United States. I think there is no excuse for a free society that subjects a woman to pregnancy, sterilization, or any other reproductive decision that she does not want to make. I wanted to participate in this program because I believe in equality, freedom, and self-determination. The people I have met and the work that I have witnessed have made these beliefs concrete, and this summer has taught me more about myself and about this movement than I ever could have expected. For that I am ever thankful.
This summer I worked as an intern in a coalition that is based out of a group of non-profit organizations. The organization I was working for out of New York City is MergerWatch. MergerWatch does work to organize communities to prevent religious and secular hospital mergers, since these mergers often result in the restriction of reproductive choices for women. This includes stopping abortion care, restricting availability of contraceptives and tubal ligations, and interferring in patients' wishes about end-of-life care. The organization is in partnership with both the Avery Institute of Social Change in Boston and the National Women's Health Network in Washington, DC. These three organizations make up Raising Women's Voices, which has regional coordinators in 12 different states. All together, the Raising Women's Voices network works to raise awareness in Washington and around the nation about women's issues in health care reform. The coalition provides forums for women to come out and share their stories of the failures of our health care system, and it works with other non-profit organizations to lobby members of congress to advocate for women's health issues.

This summer was an extremely interesting time for Raising Women's Voices. President Barack Obama made a campaign promise to promote health care reform in this country. This has resulted in the intense mobilization of people and resources to advocate for a cacophany of issues across the board, including, but of course not limited to: end of life care, affordability, portability, market competition, specific disease interests, children's health care, the public option, private options, cost effectiveness research, and drug and insurance company interests. Raising Women's Voices is interested in cluing policy makers into women's health care interests: access to accurate sex education, access to birth control and birth choices, abortion care and affordability, and health care provision across the lifespan. These issues are not popular among more conservative representatives, and the coalition found it very hard all summer to make their
needs heard. It was extremely frustrating to be working with politicians and large health care reform organizations that don't always take women's needs seriously. It was difficult, especially in a framework of laws that already makes it difficult for women to get affordable, quality, portable, accessible health care. In addition to these struggles, the abortion rights movement is already facing attacks on every front to access to abortion care, and many of those attacks are written right into law. For example, the Hyde Amendment and abortion payment continued to be an issue when policy makers began to make statements about restricting abortion from not only the public option, but from any private option that would exist in the nation-wide marketplace where individuals would shop for health insurance.

In a nutshell, we watched the movements of elected officials all summer and we worked with other non-profits to negotiate a place at the table for women's health advocates. Some exciting things we did were going Washington, DC for the health care rally in June (where Eesha and I met and spoke with Howard Dean), participating in phone conferences with nation-wide organizations working toward health care reform, and participating in multiple meetings of women's health organizations in New York State.

I did a few different things in the office during my internship. I was the primary blogger for the Raising Women's Voices blog. This job consisted of sifting through health care and women's health related media and outlining important successes and failures in congress. I wrote 4-6 short articles every day and read hundreds of reports from papers, online newsletters, activist organization information sites and magazines. I also managed the Raising Women's Voices Facebook account and updated the Raising Women's Voices Twitter feed. In addition to writing, I did some minor research on topics such as the Hyde Amendment, specific senator and representative backgrounds on women's health issues, and some fact finding on legislative
issues.

It was important in my internship to be organized and have good writing and reading comprehension skills. It was also important for me to be open to learning – it was a very intense apprenticeship to learn the details, terminology, and background of the many health reform issues on the table. I improved greatly in my ability to sift through information and determine what is important, which helped me learn quickly.

There were a few challenges I faced this summer. I found it very difficult in this internship to negotiate my place within this coalition. I found it hard to know what could have been done and when - I was unsure of what exactly was my territory and what I could have helped accomplish. However, there were important successes in my internship. I learned how to write effective short pieces of work and I learned a huge amount about the legislative process and politics. I became much more comfortable with new media and producing written pieces that were straightforward and articulate.

To make this internship experience more valuable, I would have set more clear goals. I would have had more frequent meetings with my supervisors to glean information about how to be most helpful in this organization. I would have been more insistant on larger projects, because early in the internship I realized that blogging and new media is not very fulfilling to me. I felt that much of the work I did was purely superficial, and I would have felt much better about my contributions if I had been doing more research or investigative reporting on the issues. It was difficult because so many of these issues are very important to me, and I was unsure about how to translate that into written work and helpful products.

I had very little academic background that prepared me for this internship. I am interested in the health profession and hope to become a doctor one day. I have spent much of my time at
college studying health and science, and have had very little political science or government in my studies. However, I have been involved in student government for many semesters, and much of the political savvy that is (unfortunately) required there gave me insight into the difficulties faced in making laws. It was valuable to have that perspective as I spent a lot of time observing the health care bills in committee and reading the bills myself.

    Though I didn't have much preparation for the work I did, the internship helped solidify my interest in the health profession. It made clear to me how important primary care physicians are - how important it is for our country to be focused not on capital gain but on health gain. It taught me that there is no replacement for preventative care, that this is where we need doctors. This is definitely what I will be pursuing in the coming years. In this way, this internship was extremely valuable. It gave me a perspective on policy making that I wouldn't have had before, and it convinced me of how important it is to work in many areas of a profession - the actual and the political. I had not foreseen this internship to be so pivotal in this way.

    All-in-all, my internship was a mixed bag. It was very valuable to be around the political work in health care reform, both for my general knowledge and for my beliefs. It was interesting to see so many things going on at once and to help an organization raise concerns within a larger context and sometimes see results. On the other hand, it was difficult to be doing this work since I was not adequately prepared (there was a very large learning curve for health care reform issues) and (as important as it was to learn this about myself) I was unhappy with how much time I spent behind a computer.

    For future interns, I would implore them them to be more self-directed than I was. I would encourage them to go into the internship with an idea of what they want to accomplish, and set up a schedule for how to accomplish goals. I would suggest they be very communicative
about what works for them and what doesn't. I think I would have been much happier had I acknowledged earlier that working in new media was not fully satisfying for me.

There are also a few suggestions I have for the RRASC program. Firstly, I fully believe that weekly reports were a good thing. They forced me to sit down and process my experiences, and I very much appreciated the chance to slow down a bit. However, making those weekly reports visible to anyone but CLPP staff definitely made me wary. I disclosed less about my experiences than I would have otherwise. Having a forum for students to speak to one another was helpful, but I would encourage the CLPP staff to make the reports confidential.

MergerWatch and Raising Women's Voices are made up of remarkable people who work very hard for very small rewards. I forever respect them and the work that they do. I definitely learned more about the intersections of reproductive rights and social justice - there is nothing like congress to convince a person of the importance of intersectionality. It was important to understand that laws affect people and only people can effect change. I am grateful for this opportunity, and can’t thank the people who made it possible enough. It was very important for me to be at Raising Women’s Voices this summer, during an essential period in our nation’s history, and during a period of time when it is getting more difficult for women to access the care they need. It was extremely moving to be in New York City the day Dr. George Tiller was killed, I remember being at Union Square with hundreds of other concerned citizens, rallying against the unreasonable violence against health care providers. I very much appreciate the support this movement and my RRASC experience have given me, and I look forward to how this summer influences my work in and out of the reproductive justice movement in the future.