

ROLL CALL

Around the Hill

News and personalities in the Capitol community

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Photos by Maureen Keating

The retirement of George Stephens, posing with the Senate's ham radio equipment, spells the end of the Hill's amateur radio society and the use of the station's call letters (right).

No Longer Hamming It Up

Capitol Hill Amateur Radio Society Closing Shop

By Amy Keller

Crouched in a broom closet-sized room hidden under a staircase in the Russell Building, longtime Senate aide George Stephens points to the sign that says it all.

"W3USS — I affectionately refer to it as 'Whiskey Three Uncle Sugar Sugar,'" says Stephens, a ham radio operator who has served as the Government Printing Office's liaison to the Senate Republican Policy Committee for the past 18 years.

"W3USS" is the call sign for the Senate's amateur radio station. But when Stephens retires at the end of this month, so retires the signal for W3USS.

Stephens, 64, has been running the Capitol Hill Amateur Radio Society for the past 13 years, but after 33 years of operation the club is closing its doors.

It may be surprising to some that the ham radio club — which was formally established with then-Sen. Barry Goldwater's (R-Ariz.) support in 1969 — has managed to survive at all in recent years, especially in an era dominated by the Internet and cell phones.

But it isn't surprising to Stephens.

In his opinion, those modern-day conveniences just don't measure up to ham radio.

"To me, the Internet has made introverts out of people," says Stephens. "It has drawn peo-

ple in. Amateur radio to me, is something that brings people out."

But the Capitol Hill radio group will not survive the exit of Stephens, who began his 18 years of service to the Senate's Republican Policy Committee as a printer/proofreader in 1981. That's also when he joined the association.

In its heyday, the group had about 20 members. Today there only five left, and that's why the club has reached its end point.

Stephens sadly explains that of the continuing members, the one who's closest to the club's small station in the Russell Building works over in Postal Square. Another member of the club works in the Ford Building,

and neither are in close-enough proximity to keep up with the demands of the job.

The club's beginnings trace back to 1968, when an aide to then-Sen. John Sparkman (D-Ala.) placed an ad in Roll Call asking other amateur radio operators working on the Hill to contact him. Those who responded created an informal luncheon group. Then in 1969, Goldwater became a member and expanded the group's scope and mission.

Goldwater, an avid ham radio operator who maintained his own station at his home in Arizona, also helped secure operating space for the club in a small cubbyhole under a stair-

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Photo by Maureen Keating

Maryland Democratic Rep. Elijah Cummings had filled out his policy shop by hiring three new aides: (from left) LA Aliyah Nuri, LD Beverly Fields and LA Kymberly Graves.

Aides Take up Shop In Cummings' Office

By Ben Pershing

Maryland Rep. Elijah Cummings (D) has overhauled his policy shop, hiring an LD and two LAs.

Overseeing legislation for the three-term lawmaker is LD Beverly Fields. She handles health, entitlement, telecommunications, science, energy, judiciary, budget and appropriations issues.

Fields, 33, moves over from the office of Rep. Harold Ford Jr. (D-Tenn.), where she was LD for two years. Before joining Ford's staff, Fields spent 1994 to 1997 practicing energy law at Dewey Ballantine LLP, a D.C.-based law firm.

Climbers

A D.C. native, Fields has a 1989 bachelor's in mechanical engineering from Howard University. She later returned to Howard, earning her J.D. in 1994. When she's not talking policy, Fields enjoys a second life as a classical pianist.

Snagging one of the LA slots is Aliyah Nuri, who deals with international affairs, trade, drug, census, arts, economic development and Transportation and Infrastructure Committee issues.

The 25-year-old Nuri returns to the Hill after more than four years as an administrative assistant with InterAction, a coalition of international development organizations headed up by former Rep. Jim Moody (D-Wis.).

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Photo by Maureen Keating

The ham radio equipment (above) will be donated to charity, while postcards exchanged with other operators (below) collect dust.

Senate's Ham Radio Station Closes Shop

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well in the Russell Building — a tiny space that “catches every grain of dust in the stairway,” Stephens noted.

According to the group's charter, Goldwater's aim was to establish a station “capable of restoring communications in the event of a natural disaster in the Washington, D.C., area” and capable of providing “emergency communications” to and from natural disaster areas.

Another function of the organization was to facilitate telephone connections for military personnel and others overseas who otherwise would not be able to speak with their family members, as well as contact other amateur stations worldwide “as a goodwill gesture.”

And in recent years, the Capitol Hill Amateur Radio Society has jumped into action when natural disasters have struck

across the planet. From Operation Desert Storm to the devastating earthquakes that have rocked Mexico and California in recent history, Stephens and the other “hams” have used the station to communicate with other amateurs in the affected areas.

“We were on the air with health and welfare traffic,” Stephens said, explaining that through radio contact he and other concerned parties in the Senate were able to find out about people's loved ones and to get general information flowing when it could not be obtained in more traditional ways.

As for goodwill, there's been plenty of that spread across the globe over the years by Capitol Hill's ham radio operators.

The evidence is collecting dust in the top drawer of an old gray filing cabinet in the ham radio club's headquarters, where hundreds of “QSL” cards — postcards that ham radio operators across the world exchange to celebrate contact they've made — are arranged in neat rows.

The cards themselves are relics of a bygone era — mailed to the Senate years ago by ham radio operators from such places as the former USSR, a nation known then as

East Germany and a Yugoslavia not yet ravaged by war.

Stephens fondly recalls his chats with other radio enthusiasts around the world, recounting his periodic communications over the years with a “guy in Riga, [Latvia,] whose English is better than anyone I know.”

Stephens also remembers when Members of Congress, such as now-retired Sen. John Glenn (D-Ohio), would come in and use the club's equipment to talk with students back in Ohio who were learning about radio transmissions.

Stephens said he and the Capitol Hill Amateur Radio Club very nearly got a chance to make contact with Glenn during his NASA mission last year.

But the amateur club, says Stephens, “didn't carry any weight with the powers that be at NASA.”

Though the club is disbanding, Peter Huber, another former Senate aide and longtime club member, will retain the club's call sign and license. But the club, and Stephens, will be missed.

“Like hot-metal typesetting, ham radio is truly a phenomenon of the 20th century,” said Sen. Larry Craig (Idaho), chairman of the GOP Policy Committee.

“The advent of the computer and the Internet age have reduced ham radio's appeal. And so now, when George goes, so too goes the Capitol Hill Amateur Radio Club.”

Craig noted that when Stephens retires on Friday, the club will disband, the equipment will be donated to charity and the antenna will be removed from the Russell roof.

“This marks the end of a remarkable era,” said Craig.

But Stephens doesn't think the era is over.

Hilltalk

Eat, Drink And Give to Charity

More than 60 restaurants and 30 wineries and beverage companies from the Washington area will showcase their delicacies tonight at Taste of the Nation in Union Station's Main Hall from 7 to 10 p.m.

The event — including food and wine tasting, a silent auction, prizes and entertainment — will cost \$75 per person in advance and \$85 at the door. Proceeds will benefit the Capital Area Community Food Bank, D.C. Central Kitchen, Community Family Life Services, Food and Friends and the House of Ruth. For advance tickets call Proxit at (703) 218-6500.

Glenn Speaks on His Career

Retired Sen. John Glenn (D-Ohio) will speak about his pre- and post-Congress life as a space pioneer at 8 p.m. at the Langley Theater in the National Air and Space Museum. Advance tickets only, call (800) 529-2440.

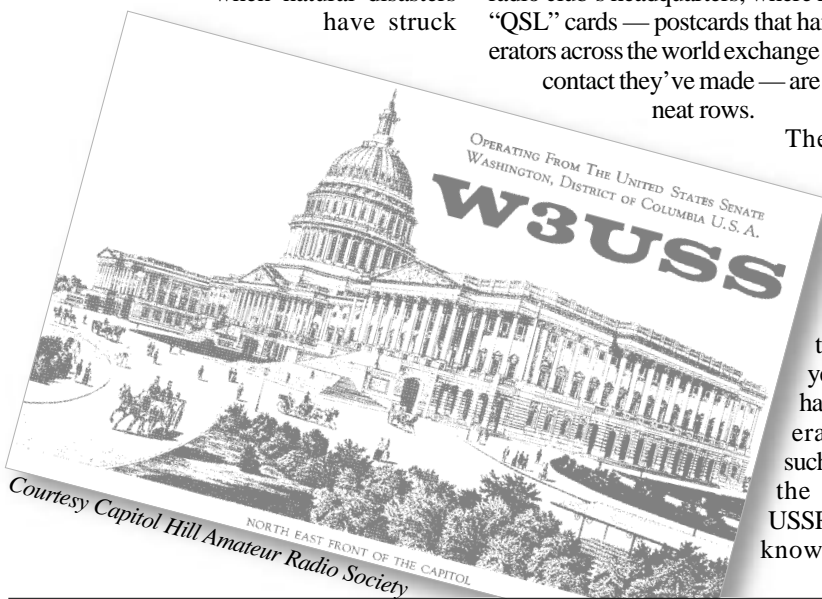
Senate Bill Rivals Davis Education Effort

Sen. James Jeffords (R-Vt.) introduced a bill that would provide D.C. high school graduates with tuition assistance for public and private colleges in D.C., Maryland and Virginia. The Jeffords bill is similar to but more limited than a House bill introduced by Rep. Tom Davis (R-Va.) which was approved by the House Government Reform subcommittee on the District of Columbia and is headed to the floor.

Davis' bill has no financial-need qualifications, but Jeffords' version limits the assistance to families headed by a single adult earning less than \$80,000 or families headed by a couple earning less than \$100,000. The Senate bill provides for \$2,000 in aid for private schools, while Davis' version allows for up to \$3,000.

Davis' version also extended the aid to D.C. residents attending college in public universities throughout the country, while Jeffords' bill limits it to this region.

— Stacey Zolt



Courtesy Capitol Hill Amateur Radio Society

CSPP Draws Two Capitol Hill Aides Into the Private Sector

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In the summer of 1994, Nuri interned for Rep. Jim McDermott (D-Wash.).

Originally from Massachusetts, Nuri has a 1995 bachelor's degree from Smith College in Northampton, Mass., where she majored in sociology and minored in African-American studies.

Taking the other LA position is Hill newcomer **Kymerly Graves**, who is also Cummings' systems manager. She works on education, labor, welfare, children and Government Reform Committee matters.

For two years before her recent move, Graves was a Web site specialist for the Maryland Department of Education. In 1996 and 1997, Graves was a political appointee in the U.S. Department of Education's Office of In-

tergovernmental and Interagency Affairs.

A native of Philadelphia, Graves has a 1987 bachelor's degree from the University of Maryland at College Park, where she majored in political science and minored in African-American studies. In 1995, Graves received a J.D. from the District of Columbia School of Law.

COMPUTER UPGRADE: Two staffers have left the Hill to work for the Computer Systems Policy Project, a D.C.-based coalition made up of 12 CEOs from top information technology companies.

Moya Morgan is CSPP's new deputy director. She leaves the Hill after holding several positions in the office of then-Rep. Rick White (R), who was ousted last year from Washington 1st district seat by now-Rep. Jay Inslee (D).

Morgan, 24, was deputy press secretary on White's 1998 campaign. For about a year before that, she was an LA in White's Hill office. Morgan also worked on White's 1996 bid, and has had stints interning in both his Hill and district offices.

A Seattle native, Morgan has a 1997 bachelor's in political science from Seattle University.

Joining CSPP as coalition manager is **Jennifer Taylor**. The 22-year-old Taylor leaves

Birthday Greetings

APRIL 27
Rep. Joseph Moakley (D-Mass.), 72

APRIL 29
Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-N.J.), 53
Rep. Carrie Meek (D-Fla.), 73
Rep. Jim Ryun (R-Kan.), 52
Rep. Deborah Stabenow (D-Mich.), 49

APRIL 30
Rep. William Clay (D-Mo.), 68
Rep. Robert Scott (D-Va.), 52

the Hill after nine months as a staff assistant with the House Commerce Committee. Last year, she worked on California Rep. Brian Bilbray's (R) successful re-election bid. Taylor has also interned for Commerce Chairman Tom Bliley (R-Va.).

Originally from Richmond, Va., Taylor graduated last year from James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Va., where she earned a bachelor's in mass communications.