

# Hill Climbers: Forget Snow Days

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Roll Call Staff

If you poked around the office of Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner (R-Wis.) during the recent blizzards, someone would have been there. Even with record snowfalls, the Sensenbrenner office is known to keep humming through thick and thin.

Wendy Riemann and Matt Bisenius met the call of duty that comes with working for Sensenbrenner. And both staffers recently signed up for more.

Riemann was recently promoted from press secretary to communications director. The move marks a consolidation and expansion of Riemann's duties.

"I am taking on some new responsibilities," she said. "It shows how the job has evolved. I've been doing a lot more in terms of writing and blogging."

Riemann, 30, joined the Sensenbrenner team as press secretary in 2008. Capitol Hill came on the heels of Riemann's stint with the McCain/Palin campaign, where she was Midwest communications director, overseeing messaging in Iowa, Illinois and Missouri.

"When the campaign finished, I knew I was unemployed so I relaxed for a couple weeks and started looking," Riemann said. "I wanted to find a good job where I'd be a good fit."

Riemann connects to Sensenbrenner through her hometown of Sheboygan, Wis., which Sensenbrenner represented until redistricting following the 2000 Census.

"I remember waving to him in parades as a kid," Riemann said.

Riemann said she knew politics would be her career pursuit while still a student at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Summer internships at the Department of Agriculture and the White House were just icing on the cake.

"I felt the need to do public service and to write," she said. "The political process combined the two and seemed like the best outlet."

After graduating with a journalism degree in 2002, Riemann started in public affairs at the Department of Health and Human Services.

Riemann's role would quickly expand. Soon after her arrival, Riemann became a speechwriter for then-HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson.

Riemann said "God was smiling" with the first speech she wrote — for Thompson's acceptance of the UW Distinguished Alumni Award in 2003.

When Thompson resigned in 2005, Riemann headed to Florida to work as speechwriter for then-Gov. Jeb Bush (R). The transition to the Sunshine State proved to be worthwhile.

"I wrote about anything and everything," Riemann said. "With the 2005 hurricanes, we had nationally televised speeches. It was an incredibly fast-paced environment but so rewarding."

Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner staffers Wendy Riemann and Matt Bisenius haven't let a little snow get in the way of their work for the Wisconsin Congressman.

After two years with Bush, Riemann joined the Florida Department of Health as communications director. While there, Riemann designed a public service campaign on disease prevention. Riemann and her team became Emmy winners with a television public service ad called the "Fifth Guy" to raise hygienic behavior.

"We wanted to use humor — almost like the television show 'The Office' — to get awareness out about washing your hands to stop germs," Riemann said.

Also while in Florida, Riemann pursued a master's degree in communication from John Hopkins University, earning the degree in December 2006.

Riemann moved back to D.C. in 2007 to work as an account supervisor with the public relations firm Edelman. Although Riemann would have been content to stay there, her time with Edelman was cut short after she received a call from the McCain campaign.

"I jumped on the offer to work with the campaign," Riemann said. In no time, Riemann oversaw campaign communications for three states.

Even though the 2008 election results weren't as Riemann hoped, she parlayed her new political experience with Sensenbrenner starting in February 2009.

Bisenius, 25, marks another change in the Sensenbrenner office. The staffer was recently promoted from legislative correspondent to legislative assistant and will advise the lawmaker on banking, finance, housing, postal and governmental issues.

The move marks a consolidation of Bisenius' portfolio load. "Before this, I was mainly writing letters," Bisenius said. "I've been busy studying up now and attending hearings."

The position marks Bisenius' third job with Sensenbrenner. In 2008, Bisenius started as a systems administrator. After nearly a year, Bisenius moved to the policy side as a legislative correspondent, where he stayed until his promotion earlier this month.

Bisenius is a 2007 graduate of Florida State University and earned a degree in political science. Bisenius, a native of Alexandria, Va., said, "Once college was over, I knew that I wanted to get involved in politics."

Bisenius' entrance onto the Hill came in early 2008 with an internship with former Rep. Tom Davis (R-Va.). He interned with Davis for four months before moving to work with Sensenbrenner.

Bisenius, along with Riemann, is a member of the office flag football team, District 5. When not catching footballs, Bisenius said he gets his sports fix playing golf with his dad or snowboarding. The staffer spent part of the Presidents Day recess snowboarding at Lake Tahoe, Calif.

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