Stop feeling sorry for yourself.
You could be a first-year associate at Arnold & Porter, a member of Rep. Gary Franks' staff, or working directly under Ralph Nader. BY DAVID SEGAL [22]
"What do you do?"

Washington's mantra. To live in the District is to hear this query ad nauseam. Conversations inevitably converge on the question, and the only way to reliably avoid it is to make conscious efforts to block the subject, which only make it oppressive in a subtler way.

The ubiquity of the "profession question" might lead one to think the town is lousy with great jobs, but the opposite is true: It's great with lousy jobs. As the last resort of the college grad who's confused and the first resort of the college grad who's careerist, Washington is a personnel traffic jam of transient laborers in coat and tie, a hive of résumé-clutches eager for exploitation, with a supply-driven abundance of organizations just as eager to exploit them.

Many Washington newcomers end up in the non-profit realm, congressional offices, or the federal bureaucracy. Then there are the lawyers, 29,397 at last count. Even if they like their jobs—and most seem not to—it must be miserable to have to confess, day in, day out, "I am a lawyer," especially in a town where the profession attracts unparalleled derision. But never mind the lawyers for a moment: Every workplace has a boss, and in Washington, a town where the only thing more prevalent than power is the illusion of power, being appointed boss is enough to transform the most genteel out-of-towner into a Beltway fascist.

Hence, there are unpleasant jobs in numbers too vast to count. What follows is not an exhaustive list—in fact, it's not intended as a list at all. It is more of an exercise in psychological boosting, an open invitation to an "I-don't-have-it-that-bad" shiver of Schadenfreude. And has there ever been a greater need for a collective pick-me-up? The recession keeps the economy, Soviet nukes are pointed boss is enough to transform the most genteel out-towner into a Beltway fascist.

The stress comes not from the slowness of the DMV, which is a certitude, but from the unforeseeables that rattle the day's schedule. USVRS keeps operations running smoothly with two-way radios, computers, and fax machines, but inevitably something goes wrong; a customer forgets a document, a pickup is missed. For a business whose only product is service, making the customer's experience hassle-free is essential. The foot-tapping anxiety of standing in line is excruciating for civilians, but imagine how you'd feel if the wait was going to cause you to lose customers?

Then there's the ever-present worry that some jerk is going to broadside the customer's $50,000 chariot. Montgomery says it has happened only once, when a Ford truck ran a red light and front-ended a USVRS-driven Thunderbird. By some unhappy twist of fate, Montgomery happened to witness the尔's $50,000 chariot. Montgomery says it has happened only once, when a Ford truck ran a red light and front-ended a USVRS-driven Thunderbird. By some unhappy twist of fate, Montgomery happened to witness the custom-