

Jose Gallegos Ruiz

HEP/ CAMP Intern

Week #1

As soon as I got onto the plane, I took a deep breath, closed my eyes and thought about my parents and all the sacrifices they have made for me and my siblings. Today, June 10th is the fifth anniversary of my family immigrating to the United States, in search for a better life. I opened my eyes and a small tear came out. A small tear that had all the struggles that my family and I have encountered over these past five years. Then, a second tear came out and I thought about how far I have come and how blessed I am for having this tremendous, once in a life time opportunity. Finally, a third tear came out, a tear of happiness and hope that washed away my insecurities and gave me the strength to prepare myself for this unique experience. Now, I want to share this journey with you. The journey of a kind, responsible and hard-working young man who five years ago left his hometown in Jalisco, Mexico, in a search for better educational opportunities and now is going to be part of a life changing internship program in Washington D.C.

I had a five-hour flight from San Francisco, California to Washington D.C. As soon as I landed, I turned on my phone and I received a message from Patrick Doone, the man behind the scenes of this incredible internship, asking me to wait for him right next to the security check point. After a couple of months of anxiety and curiosity, I met Patrick and the other six interns. At first, it was a little bit difficult and awkward to keep the conversation going between myself and the other interns, but as soon as we took a taxi to George Washington University (GWU) the tension and fear faded away.

That same night, Patrick took us out to dinner. We had dinner at this delicious and fancy Italian restaurant. While we were eating, we shared a little bit about our personal stories. Hearing the stories of the other interns brought a feeling of hope and admiration which motivated me to begin creating a strong relationship with them. After dinner, we went to see the White House. Although we are living in a rough political time, it was amazing visiting the White House. Honestly, I feel both lucky and blessed to be part of this internship and have the opportunity to be in D.C. Finally, after a long day, Patrick gave us information about the metro and our business cards. Everyone seemed to be confused and overwhelmed because it was a lot of information to comprehend in a short period of time. Yet, Patrick told us to relax and to absorb this information step by step. On Sunday, we explored the city. We went to Capitol Hill to visit some of the national monuments and almost by the end of the day we did grocery shopping.

Throughout the week, we were part of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (CHCI) which is an organization whose main goal is to create the next generation of Latino Leaders by exposing them to public policy and leadership in Washington D.C. We had several interesting workshops; public speaking, learning how to network, etc. I was very inspired by Lorenzo Olvera, CHCI Alumnae and Head of the Senate Diversity Initiative in the U.S. Senate. He is a very important man in Capitol Hill, but what inspired me the most was his personal experience and how his "Ganas" gave him the strength to overcome his problems. He strongly emphasized that if we want to achieve our dreams, we need to work hard.

Overall, my first week in Washington D.C. was super busy and productive. We had the opportunity to meet Javier Gonzalez who used to be part of the HEP/CAMP Association a couple of years ago and now

he is the Chief Operating Officer at the East Coast Migrant HeadStart Project. He kindly invited us to a baseball game to spend time together and share our personal stories with him. It was the first baseball game any of us every attended. We had a wonderful time chatting with Javier and watching the Washington Nationals beat the Atlanta Braves. On Thursday night, both the HEP/CAMP interns and the CHCI interns were part of the Tri-Caucus Reception. We had the opportunity to meet Interns from the Congressional Black Caucus and Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus. During this nice reception, we had the opportunity to meet some CHCI's alumni as well. It was very helpful to talk to both the interns and the CHCI's Alumni because we shared our struggles and dreams but most importantly we had the opportunity to network and create a professional relationship. After this reception, I realized how privileged I am to be part of both the HEP/CAMP Association and CHCI because these two associations work super hard to educate Latinos and to increase diversity in Capitol Hill. I feel proud of being part of these two associations and to be able to represent their names on Capitol Hill.

Friday was a long and interesting day. We started off by meeting Irene Bueno who works for the HEP/CAMP association in D.C. Additionally, we also had the pleasure to meet Giev Kashkooli, one of the Vice Presidents for the United Farm Workers (UFW). This meeting was super emotional and interesting because we all had the opportunity to talk about our experience as migrant workers and some of the challenges that we have encountered. We also came out with possible ideas on how to improve the working conditions of farmworkers and new regulations to protect them. Having a one of one conversation with Giev was awesome because he was so genuine and passionate about his job. Later that day, we went to visit the offices in which each one of us would be working. I am very excited to work at the Office of Migrant Education (OME). I had the pleasure of meeting the team I am going to be working with. Everyone in the office was extremely nice and made me feel comfortable. Working at OME is an honor, because when I first moved to the Unites States, it was the Migrant Program staff who took me under their wings and guided me through my high school career. Without their resources and support, I would not be in the place where I am now. My first week in D.C. was incredible. I had a lot of fun and learned a lot of things. Lastly, I want to thank Patrick Doone for being so supportive and caring to me and all the interns. We learned so much from you and we hope to see you soon.





