

Jasmine Meraz

Week 8 Journal

As week eight came and left, I spend the majority of my time attending as many briefings and have as many meetings with staffers as possible. I started on Monday with a briefing on the economics of the drought and how the United States is dealing with different variations of the drought across the map. I didn't think I would spend time investing myself in learning about different issues regarding the agriculture but coming from a mother who works year round in the fields, I thought it was important to give it a shot even if it wasn't my major or my emphasis for my internship.

Tuesday we had a brown bag lunch with our Legislative Director who gave us the ins and outs of all the senate rules and all the procedures that are so critical to follow. It was great to be able to hear the proper procedures, although it was a little late but we all understood as he had a busy schedule for the majority of my time there. The fact that he made time for all of us to talk for over an hour about any Senate rule questions or anything was great because it shows that they do take the time to check in with their interns and help them out as much as possible.

Thursday I got the great privilege to attend the Latino Summit at the Senate and got to hear amazing speakers and panelists give their words of wisdom as well as answer questions we were all eager to know. This was a once in a lifetime opportunity to see many powerful Latino leaders on the capital as well as big advocates and people who are doing their part to help their fellow Latino communities. We got to hear from a variety of organizations on the panels from Voto Latino to attorney companies representing Latinos; not only they spoke, we also got the amazing opportunity to hear Senator Bob Menendez from New Jersey, Julian Castro Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Tom Perez Secretary of Labor, Senator Elizabeth Warren, and

many others speak to young Latinos and encouraged us to go back to our communities to make a difference because only we can change the world we live in.



Then Friday came and also my last day working in the amazing office that I spent almost two months. We had a brown bag with our Intern Coordinator then our Scheduling Team after; they talked to us about dos and don'ts of interviews and resumes, the busy life of running the Senator's day, how to manage home and work life, and their life experiences that have helped them to what they do on a daily basis. It really was amazing to get to know all the staffers on a deeper level where they could be honest to us and tell us the hard truth although it might've not been the answer we were hoping to get. The rest of the day consisted of intern check ins, one last time for me and my meeting with my Intern Coordinator to turn in and discuss my exit memo I had to write for the office. We got to talk for a long time and discuss my experience in the office, my highs and lows, and my overall feeling of the internship. After a long 30 minute talk, the day was over and we all got to go home as we get off at 3 on Fridays when we're in recess.

Saturday I spent the day with two of my intern coworkers and we headed to the famous Ben's Chili Bowl here in DC and it lived up to its name by being a top good chili. We spent a

good time there talking about my internship and what plans we all had once we returned back home, and I'm happy to know that we're all going to try and hang out, especially one of them who go to Oregon State as well. The rest of the day consisted of shopping and walking around the mall; it was great to just have good quality girl time as many refer to it as it was much needed as we all haven't been around our best friends in so long. After a long 3 hours in the mall we decided to call it a day as we were all tired from walking around up and down 4 floors of the mall. I'm so glad that I was able to gain such a close relationship with my intern class and get to know them on a different level as many offices don't do that very much, but I was fortunate that as all Oregon students, we were able to connect and spark each other's interests.



Sunday we got the amazing opportunity to once again to go to Dr. Lisa Ramirez's home for a BBQ and what would be a talent show as well as a surprise birthday party for Monse. There we were able to perform a skit based on our experiences of this internship. It was great to get to share our lives with Dr. Lisa's friends and family just so they can get to know us a little better with the short time we were here. We finally got to sing Monse happy birthday although her birthday wasn't until the next day. We wanted to make her birthday memorable and I believe we did that for her. After a long talent show and skit, we all had the opportunity to talk to Dr. Lisa

and her friends on a closer level and it was amazing to see how much they admired us when we should be the ones to be admired by them. We got to talk to Dr. Lisa and discuss her book that talked about her life obstacles and how they've gotten her to where she is now; and she is someone truly amazing and inspiring to talk to and listen. This experience to be surrounded by such a strong woman with so much power has truly motivated me to become a better person and has made me more determined to continue my education in order to make a name for myself. Thanks to Dr. Lisa, I found in myself things that I didn't know and that's something I will take with me forever.

The last week at work was a bittersweet moment; not only because we are finally done with an eight week long internship but because we finally get to go back to our communities that we've been away from and share what we've learned. Coming from the background I come from, I never thought this internship opportunity was ever possible, but because of people like my advisor Amas who helped me get here I was able to experience a once in a lifetime opportunity to go away from my beautiful state of Oregon. Not only did he give me this internship opportunity, he gave me the opportunity to grow as a student, an activist, a daughter, a friend, a mentor, and as a Latina. If it wasn't for people like him in my life and the life of my fellow CAMP students back at Oregon State, we would not be the young adults we are today going into our second year of college. It's because of people like him and my staffers in my office who take the time to get to know us and see the greatness in us that we are able to grow and realize that we're not just stereotypes, we're students and we matter to our communities and the future of this country.

The people in my office made my experience interning on the hill and in the United States Senate in specific has me so thankful that I got to be around such positive and encouraging

staffers and interns that can't always be said by all offices. There was one staffer in particular that made my experience the best it could've been, and she wasn't my legislative correspondent that I was assigned to but she was the only Latina working in the office, and that was equally as important. As a first-generation Latina interning somewhere so far away from home, it's hard to have someone to look up to or even be able to talk about issues because your family can't relate to what you're experiencing of feeling. Being able to hang out with her and my other intern coworker Gisselle has made it easier for me to feel comfortable in an office and an area that I'm not familiar with; having people like them was made this experience so much better, and I felt important and wanted.

Being away from home was a big challenge for me as I'm the youngest child and the only girl so it wasn't easy for my mother to let me go. My mom has always been my biggest supporter and best friend, but knowing I was away from home broke my heart because I couldn't help her and be there for her when she needed. Anyone that knows the life of a farm worker knows that May through October is crucial as it is harvest season and the most work happens during this time; because of this I was not able to talk to my mom during the week as much I would like and if I did she would be too tired to talk about much, and to make it harder being in a three hour time difference made it harder for us to find a time to talk to have a quality conversation.

Being so far away was difficult at times, but I was blessed enough to be around such a good group of people who are so encouraging and uplifting even when times were hard. When you live the life that I have, an opportunity like this doesn't just happen. My mother's only goal was to get me through high school, she wasn't thinking far ahead of that, but she knew I dreamt of going to college although we both didn't know how it was financially possible for me to do so. Because of this internship, I was able to listen to amazing Latino leaders and advocates,

attend briefings on issues that I was concerned or lacked knowledge of, and I was able to gain a close net relationship with my office, especially Erika the only Latina staffer who took the time to be there for me when I thought no one cared. This experience with her and this officer made it one of a kind, it made it unforgettable.

Thank you to the HEP/CAMP Association and Amas especially for this amazing opportunity I have been blessed with. Because of this internship I was able to tell my fellow interns my life story in hopes they would understand who I am better and why I am the way I am. My dream is and always will be to make my mother proud and because of people like the HEP/CAMP program who believe in people like my fellow CAMP students and me. That dream has become a reality and it's all thanks to you. My family will forever be grateful for this amazing opportunity to do something positive with my life and break the boundaries that have existed in my life for so long. I love you all and thank you for your dedication to helping all of us

--Jasmine Meraz