

Week 1: 1,611.5 Miles Away from Home

Once I stepped out of the airplane in the Ronald Reagan National Airport, I felt that I was in a different world. I come from a small, rural, southeastern Colorado town called Manzanola. Naturally, I felt a change in population, social environment, geography, and culture. I was the first intern to arrive and meet Patrick Doone and his wife. Since we had to wait hours for the other interns to arrive, Patrick gave me a “tour” of the airport, pointing out different landmarks located in Washington D.C. Little by little, the other interns started to arrive.



Later that evening, we headed out to see the White House and the Lincoln Memorial. Despite walking through swarms of mosquitoes, the experience to see the most well-known landmarks in the United States was unreal. The view of the Washington Monument from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial late in the evening is extremely peaceful and oddly therapeutic. I wish I were able to sit

there for hours, absorbing the moment through my senses.

The following day we moved into the George Washington University (GWU) dorms. We traveled and explored the metro for the first time in the attempt to understand how to get to different stations. We left the metro in L'Enfant Plaza Station and walked over to see where the Department of Education was located for three of the interns that were placed to work in that building. We then headed out to see the Botanic Garden near the United States Capitol to observe a variety of plants in different environments. Then, we headed out to see the location of the Longworth House Office Building where I will be doing my internship with Representative Raul Grijalva, along with two other interns in different offices.



The third day came along, falling on Memorial Day. We went to the Smithsonian where various museums were located. I went to the National Museum of Natural History and looked at the biology and early human displays. I was engrossed, however, by the geology/gems and minerals section of the museum. It was significantly less crowded and it allowed me to look at the displays in depth. I



was able to find interesting minerals/gems that had me intrigued when I saw them. Afterwards, we stopped by the Memorial Day Parade. I then remembered my local hero, SSG Justin Vasquez, of Manzanola, Colorado, who gave the ultimate sacrifice for us to be able to enjoy freedom.

Tuesday came along, which meant that that was the day that we started orientation lessons with the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (CHCI). Meeting the CHCI interns was enlightening since I have more people I can count on during my time in Washington, D.C. I thought that the most insightful information the conference provided was the ‘do’s and don’ts’ of working in the Congressional offices and what to expect out of our internship. The main phrase that I have been hearing through the week was the following:



“You make of this internship what you want it to be.”

I agree. I can make this internship the most thrilling and memorable experience I have had in my life, or I can just be a passive intern who does not engage. Although I tend to be stressed when I start a project or a job, I tend to warm up and adapt quickly so that I am comfortable to take the next step that will allow me to engage in the project in depth.

A key term that was often brought up during the conference was ‘networking.’ As it turned out, my idea of networking is totally different than the perception of those in Washington D.C. The networking culture in Washington, D.C. has personal gain attached to conversations rather than just enjoying a casual meeting. It made me wonder if many of those connections that people have made are genuine conversations without a desire of personal gain. D.C. networking is a culture shock for me.



We had our professional pictures taken on Thursday morning. Afterward, the CAMP interns walked over to the Longworth House Office Building to meet with the staff members that were available. Since the office was in recess, many staff members were not in the office. I did, however, get a chance to meet Norma Salazar in Representative Raul Grijalva’s office. She mentioned that she was a CAMP alumni and had gone through similar experiences that we had been through. Norma, along with other staff members who were in the office at the time, were kind and welcoming. I appreciate the way that Representative Grijalva’s office is decorated since it represents what he and his staff work hard for: the 3rd Congressional District of Arizona.



During Friday’s dinner, I confessed to Patrick that during the time that I was applying for the internship, I was extremely discouraged because I had seen previous intern’s resumes and I felt that I was not able to compete with interns that had such well-rounded applications. I come from a small, rural town in southeastern Colorado that has a population of 500. We do not have the same engagement opportunities that stand out in resumes. I felt that I had a limited amount of skill to offer for the internship. On the other hand, I am not a political science major. I am a cellular and molecular biology major minoring in chemistry and Spanish. I was hesitant to even complete the application, but did so anyway because I felt it was a great opportunity for me to represent

CAMP and be able to become a role model for the students back in my community. Patrick then went on to say that I deserve this placement as an intern, and not only did he believe in me, but also my CAMP staff thought that I should be nominated to represent CAMP in Washington D.C. I felt comforted after hearing Patrick's words, and I truly appreciate that he was with us during our first week of settling in Washington, D.C.



On Saturday, CHCI and CAMP interns left to Adamstown, Maryland to participate in a ropes course, zip lining, and team building activities. The thought of falling was terrifying, but with the help and positive peer pressure of my ropes-course buddy, Eduardo Fox, a CAMP intern, and the CHCI interns, I was able to complete the ropes-course activity. Some of the valuable concepts I learned during the various activities done in Adamstown were:

1. Even though the person in front of me succeeded, it does not necessarily mean that their exact method will allow me to succeed as well. I need to make modifications and adapt to my needs and skills.
2. I am able to trust those that have succeeded, and more likely than not, they wish for my success as well.
3. I am my greatest enemy. I have the choice to be optimistic or pessimistic.
4. Be aware of your strengths, but do not disregard weaknesses.
5. Everyone brings strengths to the table, no matter how big or small.



Marlene's Notes:

1. Living in Washington, D.C. is expensive
 - a. Budgeting skills are important
2. Hot outside temperatures and cold air conditioners will make you sick
 - a. Take medicine as soon as symptoms occur
 - i. Sore throat
3. Safety precautions are necessary when walking in the streets of Washington, D.C.
 - a. Bring a walking buddy with you when traveling long distances
 - b. Always tell someone where you will be going
 - c. Keep your belongings close and watch your surroundings
 - d. Pretend you are a Washington, D.C. native
4. Smithsonian museums are free (with some exceptions)
5. Every intern, no matter their education level (undergraduate, graduate, or professional), starts out by doing the same tasks as other interns
 - a. Answering constituents' calls and emails
 - b. Running errands
 - c. Sorting email
 - d. Writing memos of hearings/briefings for staff members and their representative

- i. Depending on how well one completes tasks, staff members will give interns tasks that are more challenging to “star” interns

