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Through the UC Berkeley Washington Program and the sponsorship of the Center on Civility & Democratic Engagement, I had the opportunity to participate in an internship at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in the fall semester of 2015.

As an intern for the agency's White House Liaison Office, I was able to work with some of HUD's top leaders in the Office of the Secretary and the Office of the Deputy Secretary. These political appointees were each brought on for their expertise in housing and policy. While it was intimidating at first to meet these officials in one of the highest levels of government, I quickly realized they were a group of incredibly dedicated and passionate people devoted to securing better homes and communities for all Americans.

A lot of undergraduate students at UC Berkeley also want to change the world, including me. We cannot help but feel impassioned about making the world a better place as we learn more about it. However, after studying so many complex and entrenched issues troubling society, it is easy to experience frustration, hopelessness and compassion fatigue. It can become difficult to maintain the capacity to care about problems that do not seem to directly affect our lives. This can happen to anyone. I have also often seen people outside of Berkeley writing off current events or refusing to listen to the news. They do not seem to see the point in bothering.

For this reason, it was incredibly refreshing to find that virtually everybody in Washington, D.C., cared about what was going on in the world. On any given day, everyone I came across was eager to discuss the latest political events. The news was almost always on wherever I went, and people actually paid attention to it.

The UCDC Program was especially encouraging in fostering political awareness and discourse. It hosted weekly forums with guest speakers such as: Ann Ravel, Chair of the Federal Election Commission; Dan Balz, Chief Correspondent at *The Washington Post*; and Maria Teresa Kumar, President and CEO of Voto Latino. They spoke about campaign finance reform, divisive politics, and engaging millennials in the democratic process. One week, we even visited the Supreme Court for an audience with Justice Elena Kagan. It was fantastic having the opportunity to hear from such inspiring figures in our nation's capital along with hearing from my peers and professors. UCDC also hosted viewing parties for the Democratic and Republican presidential debates held throughout the semester. It was fantastic watching the debates with my fellow classmates with level of turnout and enthusiasm usually reserved only for sporting events.

Everyone I met in D.C. was excited to be there, working towards their dreams and goals. I learned so much about my own professional interests while interning at HUD. I was able to see firsthand the policy and political processes within one of the most proactive government institutions working to alleviate poverty and inequality in America. The Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Julián Castro, described HUD as the “Department of Opportunity.” All of the people there are dedicated to HUD’s mission of creating sustainable communities and affordable quality housing for all Americans, without discrimination. HUD is trying to level the playing field and make sure everyone’s chances for higher education, career opportunities, and quality of life do not depend on their zip code.

The stereotypical view of the disengaged bureaucrat does not apply to HUD whatsoever. There, I met some of the most sincere and hardest working people I have ever had the pleasure of working with. Even though they faced challenges such as funding cuts and an oppositional political environment at times, none of them were overly cynical and each of them maintained their commitment to their mission.

What I took away from my internship at HUD was a renewed passion for public service. Even with the pessimism that can arise in others and myself, I know I can make a difference in whatever field I pursue. I may only have a small impact in the bigger picture, but I am part of a larger movement working towards a better future for all. The Center for Civility & Democratic Engagement has been essential in framing my experience and all I have learned at HUD and in Washington, D.C.