

Bennet Awards

“Remember that you have a seat on the table, never allow others to have you as part of the menu” was the quote that my biggest mentor and current Director of Social Inclusion at the Organization of American States, Dr. Betilde Munoz-Pogossian, told me before landing my first internship at the nation’s capital. Undoubtedly, my motivation and dedication towards public service started with my story. My entire journey in the United States has been defined in two words: public education and scholarship. Coming from Venezuela when I was young without an ounce of knowledge about the language, nor the educational system was a struggle. However, the worst but most illuminating experience was about to come: homelessness. I experienced for about two years—moving to shelters, unknown houses, and even sleeping on a couch of a one bed/bath apartment—what it is to have nothing after having everything in my country of origin. That’s the beauty of it. Understanding that life is about phases. It is about adaptability. It is about understanding that we have ourselves and only our own talent and soul even when we think we have lost it all. When I had nothing, public education was the one which afforded and granted me the right to have access to education.

“You were born in a war in a very chaotic country and arrived to the U.S. at a very polarized point”, that was another quote the Former Deputy National Press Secretary for The Democratic Party, Jose Aristimuno, mentioned to me and it was very illuminating. Arriving to the U.S. during the Trump v. Hillary presidential election allowed me to discover one of the things we must work on to have an effective government and democracy: a lack of civic engagement. Although, we have made some progress, it is terrifying that half of the population does not know how a bill becomes a law. The

quarter of the population cannot identify the three branches of government and over 70% of the American people do not know who we are, think tanks.

My time at the Bipartisan Policy Center has been very illuminating and rewarding. During this political environment, our work is key. Throughout my internship, I have learned that bipartisanship is fundamental to create lasting policy change and achieve common goals for the better of the American people. A sustainable democracy is when we use our willingness and knowledge to educate others and work together for a cause that affects us all. At BPC, the biggest takeaway I have from this opportunity is the importance of teamwork. Teamwork is the key to make effective policy; and effective policy implementation happens when we all have a seat on the table, no matter our age, background, or experience.

At the Economic Policy team, I was able to learn about how to be a problem-finder. Any team can come up with a solution after brainstorming for a few hours, but a few teams are able to identify a problem that might occur in the future and after finding the problem, looking for ways to prevent the problem from happening. At EPP, we do that, we do not look only for solutions to problems, we develop ways to prevent future problems—policy related—from happening. Throughout my experience, I was able to learn about the power of collaboration and how important it is for bipartisan and policy action.

Our democracy is not something that happens only occasionally or at certain times of the year. It is, and should be, continuous and ongoing. Therefore, democracy is, and should be, an integral part of our everyday lives. The heart of democratic action

is collaborative decision making. One of the key roles of democratic citizens is to make decisions with their fellow citizens to improve their lives and the life of the community or nation. For instance, voting is one type of decision, but life is filled with situations that need to be addressed. In fact, decision-making entails critical thinking and problem solving, as part of real situations in which there are existing problems to be solved. However, problems are not solved by polarized or individuals in isolation, but through communication and collaboration with others. Problem solving is a social activity. Problem solving in a social activity brings the importance of deliberation. Deliberate decision making requires that all involved have access to all the information they need and have the skills to analyze information to think through problems.

Finally, I have learned that these tools can be and must be applied for successful policy impact in the public sphere. Undoubtedly, for truly effective policymaking and a stable democracy, deliberation through social activity is fundamental, bringing bipartisanship to the table. Deliberation needs a diversity of viewpoints and opinions, to help in learning to understand other perspectives. Deliberation is a public-building activity, and a public must include diverse points of view.