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3rd of Demember 2019

Final Report: World Press Institute Fellowship 2019

I had the chance to participate in the Word Press Institute fellowship program this year. I spent nine weeks in the United States in August-October.

World Press Institute (WPI) was established in 1961 to strengthen and promote the best practices of journalism in the United States and around the world. Each year, the institute brings together ten professional journalists from all over the world. The journalists get to know the governance, politics, business, media, journalistic ethics and culture of the United States.

Based in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, WPI is a private nonprofit organization supported by a diverse group of foundations, local and national media, multinational corporations and individuals. The sponsors are listed on their site:

<https://worldpressinstitute.org/about-us/sponsors/>

The current executive director is David McDonald, who is helped by program director Doug Stone and deputy program director Lydia Lui. They are all very nice and professional people.

This year's fellows were from Algeria, Belarus, Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, India (Kashmir), Romania, South Africa, Uganda and Uruguay/Argentina. We were all in our thirties and had at least five years of experience in our professional careers.

The themes of this year's program included nuclear threats and security, journalism in the era of President Trump, the Presidential election of 2020, agriculture and rural issues and the role of social media in politics and journalism. I wasn't familiar with nuclear issues or agriculture before, but these topics proved to be very interesting and linked to the political climate of the United States.

During the program all fellows wrote weekly blogs on the themes of the program. They can be read on the WPI website: <https://worldpressinstitute.org/blog/>

We started the program by spending three weeks in the Twin Cities area, staying in a hotel in downtown Minneapolis. Each morning we drove to the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, where the program is based and heard interesting lectures about journalism and politics. We also visited Ely in the northern part of the state and New Ulm in the southern part of Minnesota. We had local host families in the Twin Cities, and they very kind and helpful people. I was very impressed with their hospitality.

Then we travelled around the U.S. for five weeks, meeting with journalists, political, business and community leaders and policy experts. We visited New York City, Washington D.C., Miami, Austin, Chicago, San Francisco and Seattle, before returning to Minnesota for the final week of the program.

We had a wonderful but busy schedule. In New York City we visited The New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, ProPublica, CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, the Carnegie Corporation, the United Nations and the 911 Memorial & Museum. In Washington D.C. we went to The Washington Post, Politico, Axios, PEW Research, the Arms Control Association, the Stimson Center and the Heritage Foundation.

For me one of the highlights of the trip was Miami, where we had a penthouse in a beautiful art deco building on Ocean Drive, with a view to the sea. Because of the warm climate and great accommodation, it felt like a small holiday. We did have an interesting program in Miami, too. We visited the Miami Herald, Amundi - a Hispanic political polling firm, Spanish-speaking tv channel Univision and Joseph Uscinski, a political science professor who specializes in political conspiracies.

Taking part in this program was a great experience both professionally and personally. I made friends for a lifetime and learned a lot about the American society. I have a bunch of new contacts. I know who to call when I need an expert to comment on the upcoming presidential elections, for example.

I would recommend WPI for everyone who is interested in American culture, politics and media. The schedule is demanding, so one needs to take the program seriously and be willing to participate in the events actively. It requires social abilities, small talk and flexibility. We all come from different cultures and sharing a room with another person is not always easy. But for sure it was worth it.