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WKU students campaign for anti-poverty funding

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Western Kentucky University students Nicole Camargo (left) and Amanda Collins last month traveled to Washington, D.C. to advocate for anti-poverty funding.

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Two Western Kentucky University students recently traveled to Washington, D.C., to advocate for anti-poverty funding.

President Donald Trump's budget proposal calls for an \$18 billion cut, almost 30 percent, to the enacted 2017 international affairs budget. Last month, Nicole Camargo, 21, and Amanda Collins, 20, were invited by The ONE Campaign to visit the nation's capital and advocate for the funding.

The students are co-presidents of The ONE Campaign's WKU chapter. Based in Washington, D.C., the policy and advocacy organization was founded in 2004 to mobilize people to take action against international poverty and preventable disease.

Sean Simons, U.S./Canada Press Secretary for The ONE Campaign, said it encourages constituents to contact their elected leaders.

“It's particularly important for students to get involved in activism and to really be a voice for those who don't have one,” Simons said. “One of the things that we hope that students take away from working with ONE, coming up to D.C. and meeting their leaders is a lasting passion for activism.”

Camargo and Collins met with Kentucky leaders, including Republican Senators Mitch McConnell and Rand Paul and Rep. Hal Rogers. Along with opposing Trump's budget proposal, the students went to campaign for a bill called The Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development Act. The BUILD act proposes a plan to help American entrepreneurs form infrastructure projects, create first-time access to electricity and more. This in turn could bring tens of billions of dollars in new private-sector investment into the fight against extreme poverty.

Camargo, originally from Colombia, moved to Bowling Green in junior high. She is currently a junior at WKU studying philosophy with a minor in legal studies. She said The ONE Campaign gives her experience that furthers her future plans – going to law school and studying civil and human rights.

“I like that it's a lot about advocacy, and it emphasizes that we are a democracy,” she said. “They tell us to use our voice.”

Camargo got involved with The ONE Campaign through her friend and fellow student, Andi Dahmer, and because she said she wanted to fight poverty. As the organization is nonprofit, she said she feels they really do want the voices of citizens and not their money.

During their trip to D.C., entirely funded by The ONE Campaign, Camargo said they were given four days of training on how to speak with congressmen before going to lobby on Capitol Hill. She said lobby day was definitely her favorite part of the trip.

“I love going to the places that congressmen work because that's where the magic happens,” Camargo said. “That's how a country changes. And them seeing us, it does work. It's very positive to see that you are making an impact and they are listening to you.”

Camargo said she believes it is powerful for local politicians to hear from their citizens.

“We say, ‘We are your constituents and you should care because you work for us,’ ” Camargo said. “That's what the government is there to do.”

Collins, from La Grange, is a junior at WKU studying business administration management with a minor in finance. She became involved with The ONE Campaign through her friends Dahmer and Camargo two years ago.

“Once I heard what it was about, I was like this is amazing, this is awesome, I have to be a part of it,” Collins said.

On the campus level, each week the chapter holds tablings where it sets up a location on campus inviting students to write letters to their congressmen or call them regarding different campaigns that change every few months.



The current campaign encompasses what Collins and Camargo went to D.C. to lobby for – the funding of the international affairs budget. At the tablings this month, they asked students to write to Paul and McConnell regarding the issue.

Collins said she believes each person has the responsibility to help others in less fortunate situations and that she must educate others about this responsibility.

“A lot of people don’t know there are so many lifesaving programs that the U.S. funds in Third World countries,” she said.

Less than 1 percent of the current federal budget goes toward foreign aid. Camargo said she agrees this is not usually something most people know, so she would like to continue the work of The ONE Campaign no matter the outcome on the funding issue.

“We want to have a positive outlook and remain strong and committed to communicating with all sides of the political parties, working with everyone,” she said. “So whatever is decided with the budget, we’ll work from there.”

Simons said Kentucky in particular is important when it comes to these matters because the state has two very prominent elected officials in both McConnell and Rogers. Rogers is a member of the house probationary committee which has jurisdiction over these funds.

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“Kentucky is a really important place, if you will, and naturally, it’s so powerful that students are doing this work in such a critical state,” Simons said.