

## Political activist speaks on Venezuela at the University of Jamestown

*Andrés Guilarte says socialism has ruined the country's economy.*

Kathy Steiner

May 3, 2021

Andres Guilarte talks about life in Venezuela on April 26. He spoke at the University of Jamestown about the dangers of socialism. John M. Steiner / The Sun

A political activist seeking asylum in the United States said people should take care of their freedoms because they can be lost through socialism.

Andrés Guilarte's presentation last week was hosted by the University of Jamestown College Republicans.

Guilarte is a native of Venezuela now living in Washington, D.C., who said he spent most of his life being an activist. He graduated from college in 2018 and left his country in 2019 to become an intern at the Cato Institute in the U.S. but stayed here after he said it was too dangerous for him to return.

"... pretty much my whole life as a student I was fighting against the totalitarian regime," he told The Sun in an interview before he spoke at UJ. "Being on the streets and doing activism only with nonprofits, college groups but also political parties. Doing everything we can to oust the regime over there. But that's a dangerous business. Those people, they don't care about your life, they don't care at all. If they have to chase you, they will. If they're going to persecute you, kidnap you or torture they will if they can. And they always usually can."

After his work ended at the Cato Institute, he started speaking at college campuses through The Fund for American Studies, a conservative nonprofit educational organization, in response to studies that said more students had a favorable view of socialism, he said. He speaks on how Hugo Chavez came to power in Venezuela and his policies and the country's current crisis under disputed leader Nicolas Maduro. He says Venezuela has been destroyed by socialist policies and its people are suffering.

Guilarte said Venezuela was prosperous in the 1970s and 1980s with a strong economy. It began falling apart because the government began to implement policies without regard if people were going to become dependent on social programs, he said. While many programs were good, they were not sustainable, he said. The regime is run by criminals, he said, and most of the country now lives in extreme poverty.

“I want people to know that those kind of policies, price control, public control, going against freedom of speech, controlling small businesses licenses, many many socialist policies” are like a cancer, he said.

He also wants people to feel empathy for what is happening to Venezuela and its people. He said there is an immigration crisis in the region, with almost 6 million people leaving for other countries.

“No country is ready to receive those many people,” he said. He wants countries to collectively do something to help and believes the U.S. can play a role in a solution to that crisis.

Guilarte said his own family remains in Venezuela.

“It’s hard because of course, I feel extremely lucky to be in the U.S.,” he said. “Because I don’t have to worry about not having water four days a week like I used to worry about in Venezuela.”

He doesn’t have to worry about eating as he did back home, noting people in Venezuela stand in line at the back doors of restaurants to get the garbage that is thrown out. Children eat garbage in the streets, he said. Inflation is soaring.

“The economy is completely destroyed,” he said.

People are making less than \$4 minimum wage per month, he said.

“People cannot afford life with less than \$4 a month,” he said.