



NEWS & EVENTS

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Alumni Q&A: Former Puerto Rico Gov. Luis Fortuño '85 Will Welcome UVA Law's Class of 2018



Luis Fortuño '85 said holding a cabinet position in Puerto Rico exposed him to public service and transformed his perspective.

[Luis Fortuño '85](#), former governor of Puerto Rico and now a partner at Steptoe & Johnson in Washington, D.C., will welcome the Class of 2018 to the University of Virginia School of Law during orientation Monday.

Under Fortuño's leadership as governor from 2009 to 2013, during which the U.S. territory implemented major reforms, its bond rating increased twice and Puerto Rico experienced economic growth for the first time in six years (during 2011-12). His expertise as a lawyer includes a range of corporate matters, and he split his career between the private and public sectors.

Why did you want to become a lawyer?

While in college, I realized that the law affects every aspect of life. Becoming a lawyer would not only allow me to practice law; it would also provide with tools that are useful in different settings and circumstances. Those legal skills have been handy in my law practice, the corporate world and public service.

How did you start your career in law?

After graduating from the University of Virginia Law School, I wanted to practice corporate law immediately. My wife had not finished her law degree in Puerto Rico yet. Thus, going back to Puerto Rico to allow her to complete her graduate studies was the next logical step. As a result of us moving

back to the island, I accepted a position as an associate at McConnell Valdes — at the time, the largest law firm south of the Rio Grande.

Class of 2018 Orientation Speaker Luis Fortuño '85



You worked for a law firm for several years after law school. How did you make the decision to also pursue a career in public service?

After practicing law for eight years and becoming a partner, I reluctantly accepted a cabinet position for the next four years. That experience exposed me to public service and transformed my perspective of what could be achieved as a public servant. However, after four years, I decided to go back to my law practice mostly to be able to fulfill my responsibilities as a father of triplets. After happily practicing law for another eight years, I was elected as the island's sole representative in the U.S. Congress. Four years later, I served as governor as well.

Looking back on your role as governor of Puerto Rico, what are you most proud of?

The implementation of the most aggressive public-private partnership program in the nation, with special attention to public schools.

Puerto Rico is facing a challenging fiscal crisis today — what steps could be taken to improve the situation?

First and foremost, Puerto Rico must regain the market's trust. This takes time and requires decisive and difficult actions. As part of said effort, it must rein in government expenses again, implement pro-growth policies, and implement institutional reforms that promote sustained economic growth and full transparency.

Could you describe your work at Steptoe & Johnson? What is a typical day like for you?

Even though I must draft or negotiate contracts and documents for our clients, a substantial portion of my day is spent in conference calls and meetings. Additionally, my responsibilities require that I regularly travel to Latin America as well. Finally, I also devote time to external activities, address conferences and groups and fulfill my internal administrative obligations to my law partners.

How did law school help prepare you for your career? Were there courses or opportunities you

wish you had taken?

UVA Law School transformed me into a more analytical person. Additionally, it assisted me in drafting more succinctly. Most importantly, it helped me understand that laws allocate risk, while public policy determines whether said allocation of risk is reasonable, or the consequences it may have. Looking back, I should have considered the joint [J.D.-MBA program](#).

Do you have any advice for UVA Law students interested in pursuing a leadership role in politics?

First and foremost, utilize your time at UVA wisely and get ready. Secondly, that we are called to serve our community, state or nation in one way or another. Public service can be accomplished through a nongovernmental organization, appointed or elective office, or teaching. What is important is to give back to our community and to do so for the right reasons.

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