



President's Commission on White House Fellowships · Winter 2014 Newsletter

2014-2015 Class meets with the First Lady

In the midst of all the holiday hustle and bustle at the White House, we were honored that First Lady Michelle Obama took the time to meet with the Fellows for an intimate talk. Mrs. Obama shared her insights on leadership, balance, and the causes that are closest to her heart with the class. It was a real privilege to share the afternoon with the First Lady and my fellow classmates, and we all appreciated Mrs. Obama's candid and insightful remarks. Her experiences, both in and out of the White House, made for fascinating lessons on how to negotiate boldly for ourselves and the importance of authenticity as we look for ways to continue serving the greater good.

As a military officer, wife, and mother to a two year old little girl – I have found my placement to be a chance to truly "walk the talk" on supporting our military service members and their families. Within two days of checking in at the Office of the First Lady, I had a portfolio that included ending veteran homelessness by 2015, creating economic opportunity for military spouses and veterans, and addressing some of the unique challenges faced by women veterans and service members. I spend much of my time working across the public and private sector leaders to create training and hiring commitments that lead our veterans to education and careers. All of these issues overlapped in an interesting way on one of my very first projects. As a follow-up to an earlier round table that had inspired First Lady to focus more closely on women veterans, I had the opportunity to coordinate a Career Readiness Summit for Women Veterans. We brought together public and private sector leaders ranging from the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and the Director of the Of-



The 2014-2015 Fellows meet with the First Lady in the Diplomatic Reception Room.

ice of Personnel Management, to Bobbi Brown (the founder of Bobbi Brown Cosmetics) and executives from LinkedIn to make a commitment to veterans and work directly with more than 200 women veterans on launching their own civilian careers. The First Lady gave a moving keynote speech that had most of the audience in tears, including a few retired Master Chiefs, and urged the women to advocate for themselves and other women as they bring their leadership and technical skills to the civilian marketplace.

The first few months of my placement at the Office of the First Lady have already been an amazing education on practical leadership in large organizations. The First Lady's office tackles important, complex issues without much in the way of budget, staff, or direct authority. We must rely largely on "soft power" and persuasion to serve some of the most vulnerable and

unheard Americans. It has been an inspiration to see the urgency that the First Lady and the rest of the office feel when they tackle topics ranging from childhood obesity and international girls educations to securing public private partnerships to support military families and veterans. It is even more inspiring to see the skill with which they navigate the complex web of policy, politics, and public engagement to reach our goals. The drive to accomplish our objectives, however, doesn't stop us from having a little fun! Over the last few months, we have hosted thousands of children and families for truly "once in a lifetime" moments here at the White House. Seeing the joy and excitement on their faces is a daily reminder of how lucky we are to have the opportunity to serve.

BY KATE HIGGINS-BLOOM
Office of the First Lady

A LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Commissioners, Alumni, Fellows, and Friends,

October 3rd marked the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the President's Commission on White House Fellowships by Executive Order 11183. In celebration of this momentous anniversary and the accomplishments of the last 50 years, President Barack Obama issued a [Presidential Message](#) and the Fellows program was featured on the [White House blog](#). Thanks to Commissioner Vartan Gregorian, there was also a full-page ad by the Carnegie Corporation in *The New York Times* marking the occasion and congratulating the 2014-2015 class of White House Fellows.

The 50th anniversary of this program is not only a chance to reflect on the successes of the past, but also an important opportunity to define who we want to be in the next 50 years. And, that work has already started!

On November 1, we launched the application for the 2015-2016 class of White House Fellows and we are partnering with the alumni network and friends to expand the White House Fellows family. Together, we are reaching out to new cities, educational institutions, and professional organizations to invite people to apply. To know the program is to love it, and we want more people to love it!

The alumni are, of course, deeply involved in these outreach efforts. The 2014 WHFFA Leadership Conference was a reminder of the strength of the network and the bonds of community and fellowship that unite the Fellows. We are pleased that the board created the Metropolitan Councils to ensure that we continue to recruit the best and the brightest, and we thank those who have taken on these leadership roles.

We invite everyone to get involved – whether you choose to host an outreach event, promote the program on social media, or simply introduce us to an educational institution. Please let us know how we can help you!

While our team has been focused on outreach, the Fellows have been busy! They have provided expertise and resources on the most pressing issues of the day – from Ebola to the economy to immigration to sexual assault to diversity in the federal workplace, and more. And, Francisco Leija, placed at the Department of Homeland Security, had the opportunity to deliver the President's Weekly Address in Spanish! Outside of their placement offices, they have participated in speaker seminars with leaders such as FBI Director James Comey, Soledad O'Brien and retired Admiral Thad Allen. In October, they experienced life on an aircraft carrier, and in November, they journeyed to New Orleans for their first policy trip. Whether it was meeting with Mayor Landrieu or studying post-Katrina development, the trip was a rich opportunity to see policy at the local level and understand the challenges of leadership in times of crisis and change.

The White House Fellows program office will also soon face a major change. After 36 years of service to the Federal government, Pandora Nobles-Jones will be retiring. For 14 years, Pandora has been a source of institutional program knowledge, time-tested wisdom, and *Scandal* spoilers. We will miss her dearly.

As we approach the end of 2014, I want to thank the community of leaders involved with this program. We appreciate your dedication. The fellowship is incredibly special, and I look forward to seeing its legacy grow in the new year.

Warmest regards,



Jenny



The 2014-2015 Class tours the battlefield in Gettysburg, PA during their orientation

Aircraft Carrier Visit

One of the foundational objectives of the White House Fellows program is to provide opportunities for greater military-civilian engagement through a variety of different exchanges and educational activities. One such activity is a visit to an active aircraft carrier. The current class of Fellows had this amazing opportunity in late October. It was an experience I will never forget!

For someone like me who doesn't really like flying, doesn't really like ships, and doesn't really like enclosed spaces, the prospect of flying (in a plane) onto an aircraft carrier (a ship) and staying overnight onboard (in a very confined space), wasn't very high on my to-do list. However, the White House Fellows program is also about getting out of your comfort zone and being a bit braver than you might be normally.

Beyond the incredible experience of watching F-18s take off and land, and feeling my entire body rattling thanks to the force of the engines firing on the flight deck, and beyond the awe-inspiring size and power of the carrier itself, it was meeting the servicemen and women on board that made the biggest impression on me.

I grew up without any real understanding of the military, and never had friends (until now) or family who were in the military, which made this an even more humbling and important experience. It's easy for people like me to make assumptions

about "the military" - as though the military is one monolithic group - without every really getting to know people in the military or to think about things from other perspectives. It's easy to say we spend too much on our military and that we need to cut military spending; however, this becomes more complicated when you're walking around an aircraft carrier and an 19-year-old who enlisted because he couldn't afford to go to college is telling you about how military cuts are directly affecting him and his fellow enlisted peers. Whether or not I agree or disagree with the bigger picture in terms of the use of military force and our military role in the rest of the world, I was struck by the dedication the people we spoke with had for their work. For these folks on board, there is something they believe in so fiercely that they are not just willing to risk their lives, but on a more basic and every day level, willing to live without the comforts of home and to be far away from their families, children, communities...all because of their commitment to protect and serve.

Our visit to the USS Theodore Roosevelt is something I will never forget and an experience I will always be grateful for. Not only did it make me more appreciative and aware of the service of others, it also pushed me to reflect on my own commitment to serve and what this means both throughout this fellowship year and beyond.

MARGUERITE JIMENEZ
Office of Personnel Management



Above: Marguerite Jimenez gets in gear for the aircraft carrier.

Right: The 2014-2015 Class prepares to be transported onto the aircraft carrier.



New Orleans Policy Trip

In *On Leadership* John Gardner wrote, “Leaders must foster the process of renewal.” It was his way of articulating the importance of long-term adaptability. He wrote that human systems age and effective leaders of organizations young and old find ways to keep the process of renewal in constant motion.

Until this past week I never thought about the concept of renewal in the context of an entire city. It is rare. Cities are multi-dimensional, highly complex, interdependent systems of systems, and change takes time.

However, after decades of decline, New Orleans was given this chance following the unfortunate devastation and destruction by Hurricane Katrina on August 29, 2005. No matter where we were, we remember the storm and its aftermath – the imagery of 80% of the city underwater. It was my birthday, and I had just quit my consulting job to launch my first entrepreneurial venture. Another Fellow, Kate Higgins-Bloom, a Coast Guard officer who was already scheduled to go to Louisiana that fall, received dozens of frantic phone calls telling her to pack her bags and leave immediately (she arrived in New Orleans on August 30th).

From November 17-20th, nine years after the storm, we toured the city and participated in 24 different meetings with over 50 public, civic, and pri-

vate leaders. I left impressed with the city’s progress and hopeful that the narrative for New Orleans this decade will be one of rebirth and renewal.

We focused our trip on 5 policy areas: disaster relief and response, criminal justice, education, healthcare, and culture. Our sessions included tours of the Coast Guard and City’s Emergency Response facilities, a charter school, the county prison, a new hospital, and the Lower 9th Ward. It also included excellent food from Commander’s Palace, Dooky Chase, ACME Oyster House, and Borgne, and a performance by the Rebirth Brass Band.

I learned the most from our meeting with Mayor Mitch Landrieu. He was passionate and articulate, and has brought a level of urgency and accountability much needed for the city.

From a policy perspective, most interesting to me was the strategic planning and re-organization efforts he went through upon assuming office. Critically important has been managing the city’s budget and his “cut with a scalpel, not an axe” lessons were valuable. I left inspired, not only by the opportunities to make a difference in a city like New Orleans, but also of the rewarding work to serve at the municipal level. One day I hope to have the privilege.

JACOB DONNELLY
U.S. Department of State



The White House Fellows meet James Carville, Democratic political consultant, and Mary Matalin, Republican political consultant, in their New Orleans home.

Education Report

SPEAKER SEMINARS

- ◆ Susan Eisenhower, President of The Eisenhower Group
- ◆ David Simas, Assistant to the President and Director of the Office of Policy Strategy & Outreach
- ◆ David Plouffe, Vice President of Policy and Strategy at Uber
- ◆ Christopher Lu, Deputy Secretary of Labor
- ◆ General Colin Powell
- ◆ Chuck Todd, Host of Meet the Press
- ◆ Jeh Johnson, Secretary of Homeland Security
- ◆ Bob Woodward, Associate Editor of The Washington Post
- ◆ James Comey, Director of the FBI
- ◆ Jason Furman, Chairman of the Council on Economic Advisors
- ◆ Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education

- ◆ Jack Reed, U.S. Senator (RI)
- ◆ Elizabeth Littlefield, President and CEO of OPIC
- ◆ Soledad O'Brein, Starfish Media Group
- ◆ Adm. Thad Allen (ret.), Executive Vice President at Booz Allen Hamilton
- ◆ Sally Jewell, Secretary of the Interior

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE NEW ORLEANS POLICY TRIP

- ◆ Mitch Landrieu, Mayor of New Orleans
- ◆ Michael Harrison, Chief of Police
- ◆ Charlotte Parent, Director of the New Orleans Department of Health
- ◆ Ashleigh Gardere, Director of the Network for Economic Opportunity
- ◆ Kenneth Polite, U.S. Attorney

SPECIAL EVENTS

- ◆ White House Fellows Orientation and Retreat at Gettysburg, PA
- ◆ Aircraft Carrier Embark Aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt
- ◆ Spouses and Significant Others' Lunch at the White House Mess
- ◆ Welcome Reception Hosted by Jeff and Mary Zients
- ◆ Leadership Sessions with Nate Allen
- ◆ Situation Room Tour
- ◆ Lunch with Visiting Students from The Armando Alvares Penteado Foundation (FAAP) in Brazil
- ◆ Fall Garden Tour at the White House
- ◆ Rumsfeld Foundation Central Asia Fellows Reception

COMMUNITY SERVICE

- ◆ Playground Build with KaBoom!
- ◆ Food Delivery at Food for All DC



I arrived at HHS at a very interesting time—both from a leadership and a topical interest point of view. When I arrived at the end of August, Secretary Burwell was approaching her 100th day in office, newly in charge of a massive department that, among other

things, was anticipating the second open enrollment season for the Affordable Care Act. Also upon my arrival, HHS was in the midst of managing a large piece of the human services side of an influx of Unaccompanied Minors crossing the Southern U.S. border. As Secretary Burwell was charged with delivering meaningful change to an organization that touches every American life, I had an up close and personal look at what leadership on this level looks like. “How do we measure change in an organization like this? What does true change look like? How do we know we are delivering our best efforts

to the American people?” were all questions I saw her attempt to answer.

Very quickly, however, my responsibilities here were thrown full force into the Ebola response as the epidemic in West Africa and several cases in the U.S. became front page news. Intimately involved in both the international and continuing domestic response, I have had the opportunity to not only provide meaningful input based on my experience as an airborne critical care physician, but also to write memorandums and contribute to policy documents that have shaped critical policies. The experience I have had with an organization this big, that is playing a key role in the President's whole-of-government response to Ebola, has taken my experience of leadership to a new level. I've had the opportunity to work with leaders across this great agency, and not only contribute to the mission, but also see different styles of leadership that I know will guide my own leadership development throughout this amazing year.

MARIO RAMIREZ

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

Help us recruit the next class!

There are still many ways you can get involved with the program this year. Here are five things you can do to help us reach potential applicants:

1. **Engage One-on-One.** Identify exceptional individuals who could become White House Fellows and encourage them to apply.
2. **Send an Email.** Please share information with your professional and social networks.
3. **Utilize Social Media.** Post messages promoting the program to Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc. using #WHFellows #BecomeaWHF #WHFellowsat50
4. **Sponsor an Event.** Consider hosting an outreach event. White House Fellows program staff will lend support and provide background materials.
5. **Leverage Earned Media.** We invite you to submit op-eds, contribute to news stories, and/or author blog posts to share your experiences with the White House Fellows program.

READING GROUPS – Alumni, please note that Reading Groups will take place throughout the month of February 2015. A full schedule of dates is forthcoming, but we hope you will consider participating. If you have any questions regarding the process, please contact Sophie Kim Goldmacher, Deputy Director, at sgoldmacher@whf.eop.gov.

Thank you from the Fellows Office

- ◆ We would like to thank our Fall 2014 interns, **McKenzie Schnell** and **Ariel Rofeim**. They were instrumental in supporting our outreach efforts. We will miss them!
- ◆ We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to Susan Eisenhower, Jeffrey Blavatt, and the Eisenhower Institute for the 2014-2015 orientation in Gettysburg, PA.
- ◆ We are grateful to Mayor Mitch Landrieu and his staff for hosting and meeting with the Fellows in New Orleans. We would also like to extend our thanks to R. Erich Caulfield (WHF '10-'11), who hosted a reception for the Fellows.
- ◆ This fall, we have been very fortunate to have the help of several White House Fellow alumni in outreach events across the country. We would like to thank the following individuals for their participation and continued commitment to the White House Fellows program:
 - ◇ 11/5/14 — **Teach for America/Leadership for Educational Equity (LEE) Webinar**
 - Dan Feehan
 - ◇ 11/17/14 — **New York University Outreach Event**
 - Peter Henry (Commissioner), Sarita James, and Diane Yu
 - ◇ 11/25/14 — **San Francisco Outreach Event**
 - Charina Choi, John De Luca, George Drysdale, Peter Fiske, Dan Fletcher, Karen Galatz, Dave Jones, Alan Marty, Chris Moore, and Julia Vindasius
 - ◇ 12/2/14 — **Georgetown University Outreach Event**
 - Dan Feehan, Missy Ryan, and Mark Vlastic
 - ◇ 12/3/14 — **Peace Corps Google Hangout**
 - Esther Benjamin and Timothy Docking
 - ◇ 12/11/14 — **Exelis Outreach Event**
 - Bob Edmonds, Erica Jeffries, Nicole Malachowski, and Dave Melcher
 - ◇ 12/12/14 — **Robert Graham Center Outreach Event for Medical Professionals**
 - Kisha Davis
 - ◇ 12/16/2014 — **Asian Pacific American Bar Association, Hispanic American Bar Association, South Asian Bar Association, and Muslim Bar Association Outreach Event**
 - Shirlethia Franklin, Ziad Haider, and Ted Johnson



About the WHF Program

The White House Fellows program is a nonpartisan program that offers exceptional young leaders firsthand experience working at the highest levels of the Federal government. **For more information, please visit:** www.whitehouse.gov/fellows

Please send any comments, questions, or other newsletter related communication to: whitehousefellows@whf.eop.gov