



President's Commission on White House Fellowships · Winter 2015 Newsletter

## 2015-2016 Class Meets with the First Lady

Recently, the White House Fellows met with First Lady Michelle Obama for a private conversation in the White House. This mid-December meeting gave us a chance to see the East Wing in full holiday splendor—the hallways brimming with thousands of ornaments and the smells of fresh cut spruce trees, cookies, and eggnog. Despite the mild weather outside, the warmth of the holiday themes still evoked the feeling of coming in from the cold. We met Mrs. Obama in the Diplomatic Reception Room, where she offered candid remarks on a range of topics. We laughed at her many lighthearted stories of raising a family in the White House. We were encouraged by her perspectives on balance and the importance of keeping family first when pursuing excellence in your field. We were inspired by her relentless drive to address the toughest challenges in the U.S. and abroad – including poverty, education, and veteran care. Most of all, we were impressed with her authenticity, grace and uplifting spirit as an internationally respected mother, wife, leader and public figure.

Placement in the Office of the First Lady has been a defining opportunity in my career as a military officer, as I now serve in the fight against veteran



*The 2015-2016 Fellows meet with the First Lady in the Diplomatic Reception Room.*

homelessness and unemployment. As a member of the Joining Forces team, I represent the First Lady and Dr. Biden at numerous events to celebrate the success of cities, counties, and even states as they work to end veteran homelessness nationwide. By contributing to this effort as a White House Fellow, I am learning how challenging problems like veteran homelessness can be solved through effective public-private partnerships, interagency support, and leadership buy-in at every level of government.

I also engage with public and private sector leaders to encourage new commitments to hire veterans, transitioning service members, and military spouses over the next five years. By far, the most rewarding aspect of this

placement is the chance to honor service members, veterans and military families. I have helped with dozens of Joining Forces events that remind all Americans of the debt we owe to those who serve in the military.

Working in the East Wing, I have the rare privilege of witnessing the domestic and international impact of Mrs. Obama through her leadership as a transformational First Lady. Her conversation with the Fellows gave us all a chance to learn more about her as a mother, wife and leader; it will undoubtedly be a memorable part of the fellowship year.

**BY ANDY ANDERSON**  
*Office of the First Lady*

# A LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Commissioners, Alumni, Fellows, and Friends,

The White House Fellows program enjoyed an eventful fall and looks forward to a busy 2016! The end of 2015 included a celebration in honor of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fellowship, a policy trip to Los Angeles, and a once-in-a-lifetime meeting with First Lady Michelle Obama. We are grateful to everyone who made this fall a special one for the program.

The 2015-2016 class of Fellows has enjoyed strong placements, working on important issues ranging from national security to technology policy, trade promotion and healthcare. As a part of our education program, the Fellows have had the unique opportunity to engage with a number of leaders in government, business, and the non-profit sector including Ambassador Michael Froman, Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council Cecelia Munoz, and former Senator Tim Wirth. They also had the unique chance to visit the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and meet with a survivor.

In addition to their placements, the Fellows have been actively giving back to the community through monthly service projects and events to build the family of fellowship. In October, this class of Fellows was able to join hundreds of former Fellows for the 2015 White House Fellows Foundation and Association Annual Leadership Conference and Gala to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the program. In honor of the 50th anniversary, President Obama hosted a reception at the White House where he emphasized the exceptional stories and achievements of the Fellows, and thanked the program's stakeholders for upholding President Johnson's vision and "infusing our democracy with that full, zestful sense of participation every day."

In November, the Fellows traveled to Los Angeles, California for a domestic policy trip. The trip included a top-notch training in communications at Sunnyslans and meetings with a range of national and local leaders. The Fellows had the opportunity to engage on issues of criminal justice, immigration, the environment, and technology with leaders like Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti and senior staff of the Los Angeles municipal government; Scott Budnick, Founder and President of the Anti-Recidivism Coalition; Jeffrey Katzenberg, CEO of DreamWorks Animation; Gene Seroka, Executive Director of the Port of Los Angeles; and Phil Larson and Garrett Reisman of SpaceX. The Fellows also enjoyed a reception at the home of Susan Friedman, a longtime Regional Panel Host, where they were able to meet dozens of former Fellows and supporters of the program based in Los Angeles.

In 2015, the White House Fellows program office had the great fortune of welcoming two new members to our team – Kathy Greene and Ashley Keenan. Kathy is a Retired Officer with the U.S. Army who comes to us most recently from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Ashley most recently served as Staff Assistant in the Office of Presidential Personnel at the White House. We are thrilled to have them on board!

The 2016-2017 [online application](#) closes on January 12, 2016 and we look forward to the selection process for the 2016-2017 class of White House Fellows. We sincerely appreciate all of those who supported the Fellows, our program, and our outreach efforts in 2015. We wish all the friends of the Fellowship a safe and healthy 2016!

Warm regards,



*The 2015-2016 class visits the Port of Los Angeles during their domestic policy trip.*

# Placement Report

**R**eturning fresh from our memorable orientation experience in Gettysburg, I was unsure about what to expect from my placement. Not only was I entering a completely new work environment—I was now reporting to some of the nation’s most prominent health care leaders. Needless to say, I was nervous.

What struck me almost immediately upon starting, however, was how mission-driven all of the leaders and employees are at Veterans Affairs. As a newly-minted public servant eager to serve veterans, I was welcomed and supported from the first week. My Principal, Dr. David Shulkin, is the Under Secretary for Health and a national leader in health care management, quality, and safety. He offered several avenues for me to work toward meeting his strategic priorities for the largest in health system in the nation. The Secretary, Deputy Secretary, and Chief of Staff also met with me upon my arrival, to help ensure that my experience aligned with my personal and professional development goals.

Now in my fourth month, I have been honored to lead and become part of several important initiatives at VA. One of Dr. Shulkin’s priorities is to standardize and disseminate operational best practices throughout the VA health system. He and the VHA management team have offered me the tools and resources to lead this effort, and we have already engaged over 2,000 VA employees toward this mission with an online collaborative. I have also engaged meaningfully on teams focused on improving access and establishing a new model for coordinating care—*incredible opportunities to help shape the future of VA.*

My VA experience has also given me a window into the workings of the federal government at the highest levels, including inter-agency efforts. My co-fellow at the National Economic Council, September Hargrove, connected me with some of her colleagues, and I am now representing VA in a White House initiative to employ veterans into jobs in health care.

Working at VA has been among my most satisfying professional experiences, and I have already learned a tremendous amount from my Principal and other mentors here. I am very grateful to the Fellowship and VA for this work placement, which will no doubt shape my career.

**BY SHEREEF ELNAHAL**

*U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*



*Above: White House Fellow Shereef Elnahal stands in front of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.*

# Los Angeles Policy Trip

**N**o child was he. Parents prisoner to their own pain and absent in addiction and jail, he had not the luxuries of stability, comfort, guidance. He forged his own way. He stumbled. He fell. He lived again their mistakes. He joined a gang. In his brokenness, he emanated the ills afflicted on him.

*He survived.*

*Then, in the quintessential act of human resiliency, he reached for help. He began to contribute and thereby to heal. He found himself.*

*Years into his reform, he came across a rival gang member. The man was intoxicated and combative, frightening onlookers. Boldly, he handed the man a scrap of paper with the name of the organization where he had discovered his worth.*

*The stares of those around him were familiar, but the sensation was the first of his life; they were nodding admiration.*

The owner of this story delivered it to the White House Fellows Class of 2015-2016 in advance of our policy trip to Los Angeles, California. As we began our exploration of local, state, and federal policy, his decades of work with former gang members sharpened our focus on the complexity of challenges faced by a range of communities.

While traveling, we had the privilege to engage a broad range of civic and thought leaders on issues central to the nation's future. Discussions held at sites from the Mayor's Office to

the streets of South Central centered on the role of the media in civic narrative, criminal justice reform, immigration, climate change, and technology and innovation. My own path to public service was motivated by the vibrancy and disparities I witnessed in Los Angeles, and it was compelling to view my former city through the lens of its leaders.

The opportunity to grapple with an array of viewpoints cohered what is perhaps the most formative lesson of our travel experience: when one is impassioned and ideologically committed to a goal, it is natural to paint opposing views in an adversarial light. We see this across our political system and bear witness to the resultant divisiveness and stalemate. On complex and contentious issues, collaboration and the deliberate discovery of common ground is not just wise, but critical.

"We all must remember that we belong to one another," averred the storyteller above. When we build on common ground to unlock our collective human potential, we surmount our challenges. The way forward is together, and we as a class, as a community of alumni, as a nation, as a world, are capable of greatness when we keep this principle as our bedrock.

**BY JENNIFER MACDONALD**

*U.S. Department of Homeland Security*



*Above: The 2015-2016 class of White House Fellows meets with Garret Reisman, Director of Crew Operations at SpaceX. Here they are pictured in front of SpaceX's corporate headquarters.*

# 2015-2016 Education Report

## SPEAKER SEMINARS

- ◆ David Simas, Assistant to the President and Director of the Office of Political Strategy and Outreach
- ◆ Chris Lu, Deputy Secretary of Labor
- ◆ Cecilia Munoz, Director of the White House Domestic Policy Council
- ◆ Tom Friedman, The New York Times
- ◆ Fred Hochberg, Chairman and President of the Export-Import Bank of the United States
- ◆ Charles Bolden, Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)
- ◆ General Colin Powel, Former Secretary of State
- ◆ Tina Tchen, Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff to the First Lady
- ◆ Ambassador Michael Froman, Office of the U.S. Trade Representative
- ◆ Jennifer Psaki, Assistant to the President and Director of White House Communications
- ◆ Roy Austin, Deputy Assistant to the President for the Office of Urban Affairs, Justice, and Opportunity
- ◆ U.S. Representative Xavier Becerra
- ◆ U.S. Senator Tim Worth
- ◆ DJ Patil, Deputy U.S. Chief Technology Officer and Data Policy and Chief Data Scientist
- ◆ Jeh Johnson, Secretary of Homeland Security
- ◆ Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education
- ◆ Thomas Perez, Secretary of Labor
- ◆ Thomas Vilsack, Secretary of Agriculture

- ◆ First Lady of the United States Michelle Obama
- ◆ Don Verrilli, Solicitor General of the United States

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE LOS ANGELES POLICY TRIP

- ◆ Geoffrey Cowan, President of the Annenberg Foundation
- ◆ Aileen Adams, Former Deputy Mayor of Los Angeles
- ◆ Antonio Villaraigosa, Former Mayor of Los Angeles
- ◆ Kathleen Brown, 29th California State Treasurer
- ◆ Joan and Irwan Jacobs, Founder of Qualcomm and noted philanthropists
- ◆ Creig Newmark, Founder of Craigslist
- ◆ Media Training Workshop with Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Ph.D.
- ◆ Howard Gordon, Creator of Homeland
- ◆ Visit to Homeboy Industries and Lunch at Homegirl Café
- ◆ Eric Garcetti, Current Mayor of Los Angeles
- ◆ Peter Marx, Chief Technology Officer of Log Angeles
- ◆ Charlie Beck, Chief of Policy, Los Angeles Police Department
- ◆ Matt Peterson, Chief Sustainability Officer, and Lauren Faber, Deputy Chief Sustainability Officer
- ◆ Dinner at Squirrel and Conversation with Jessica Koslow, Owner
- ◆ Great Streets Initiative Tour with Nat Gayle, Transportation Manager and Program Director for the Great Streets Project, Mayor's Office of Transportation
- ◆ Scott Budnick, Founder and President of the Anti-Recidivism Coalition
- ◆ Jeffrey Katzenberg, Chief Execu-

tive Officer, Dreamworks Animation

- ◆ Reception at the Home of Susan Friedman, Los Angeles Regional Panel Host
- ◆ Visit to the Port of Los Angeles and Boat Tour of the Port
- ◆ Phil Larson, Senior Manager of Communications and Garrett Reisman, Director of Crew Operations, SpaceX
- ◆ Karen Tumlin, Legal Director and Shiu-Ming Cheer, Immigration Attorney, National Immigration Law Center

## SPECIAL EVENTS

- ◆ White House Fellows Orientation and Retreat at Gettysburg, PA
- ◆ Spouses and Significant Others' Lunch at the White House Mess
- ◆ Welcome Reception Hosted by Jeff and Mary Zients
- ◆ Leadership Session with Nate Allen
- ◆ Inside Politics Meeting with Eisenhower Institute Students
- ◆ White House Fellows Foundation and Association 2015 Leadership Conference and Gala
- ◆ Fall Garden Tour at the White House
- ◆ Visit to the Holocaust Museum and Meeting with Halina Peabody, Holocaust Survivor
- ◆ Rumsfeld Foundation Central Asia Fellows Reception
- ◆ White House Holiday Party at the White House

## COMMUNITY SERVICE

- ◆ Food Preparation at Martha's Table
- ◆ Mentorship Session at Covenant House DC
- ◆ Food Packaging at Capital Area Food Bank



# Looking Ahead to 2016

**READING GROUPS** – Alumni, please note that Reading Groups will take place throughout the month of February 2016 and we hope you will consider participating. If you would like information on the schedule or if you have any questions regarding the process, please contact **Ashley Keenan, Associate Director**, at [akeenan@whf.eop.gov](mailto:akeenan@whf.eop.gov).

## Thank you from the Fellows Office

- ◆ We are grateful to L.A. Mayor Eric Garcetti and his staff for hosting and meeting with the Fellows; to Kathleen Hall Jamieson for our communications training; to Geoffrey Cowan and the team at Sunnylands for our leadership retreat; and Susan Friedman who hosted a reception for the Fellows. Thank you to Commissioners Christy Haubegger, Lisa Ling, and Amanda Hesser and everyone who made the trip to Los Angeles a success.
- ◆ This fall, we have been very fortunate to have the help of several White House Fellow alumni and supporters of the program 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:
  - ◇ **Harvard University Outreach Event**
    - Roger Porter
  - ◇ **Teach for America/Leadership for Educational Equity (LEE) Webinar**
    - Dan Feehan, Maxeme Tuchman, Tasha Hensley
  - ◇ **San Francisco Outreach Event**
    - Steve Spinner, Charina Choi, Karen Galatz, Jacob Donnelly, Anand Veeravagu
  - ◇ **Asian Pacific American Bar Association Outreach Event at Gibson Dunn**
    - Lindsay Rodman, Robert MacFarlane
  - ◇ **University of North Carolina Kenan-Flagler Business School Webinar**
    - Wrendon Hunt, Shawnice Meador
  - ◇ **New York University Outreach Event**
    - Peter Henry, Diane Yu, Angela Diaz, Louis O'Neill
  - ◇ **Fort Hood, TX Outreach Event**
    - Ryan Janovic
  - ◇ **Chicago Outreach Event**
    - Erica Jeffries, Candice Jones
- ◆ **Thank you to all other event hosts and those who have helped with our outreach efforts this year.** The 2016-2017 class will be stronger because of your involvement and support of the program.
- ◆ We would like to thank our Fall 2015 intern, **Brianne Mattila**. She was instrumental in supporting our outreach efforts, among other things. We will miss her!



*Left: The 2015-2016 class visits Los Angeles City Hall during their domestic policy trip. Right: The class visits the Los Angeles-based Anti-Recidivism Coalition during their domestic policy trip.*

## 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/participate/fellows](http://www.whitehouse.gov/participate/fellows).

**Please send any comments, questions, or other newsletter-related communication to:** [whitehousefellows@whf.eop.gov](mailto:whitehousefellows@whf.eop.gov)

