



President's Commission on White House Fellowships · Summer 2016 Newsletter

## 2015-2016 class meets with President Obama

**T**uesday, May 10, 2016, is a day our White House Fellows (WHF) class will always remember. That morning, we put on our best suits, dresses, and shoes, and reflected on the monumental occasion ahead of us. In the early afternoon, we met at the WHF office for a brief sync and made our way through security. We soon found ourselves in the Roosevelt Room, standing around a table, waiting in anticipation. Then, it happened – President Obama entered the room and changed our lives.

During Nationals, one of our Commissioners reminded me that “chance favors the prepared mind” – a mantra our class took to heart in getting ready for the President. Not too many people get the chance to meet with him for a closed-door, off-the-record conversation, and we fully acknowledged and honored that fact and approached the meeting with gratitude, humility, and preparation. We spent all year thinking of questions and, in March, began to refine our question to ensure diversity and comprehensiveness.

After brief introductions from our class, President Obama made opening remarks and jokingly said “now, it’s your show” – graciously allowing us to jump right into questions and drive the conversation. We wasted no time. “Now that you have been on the ground in Cuba, what are you most hopeful about and what things did you maybe misunderstand and now are a little worried about?” “Can you describe how you and the First Lady arrived at a place of mutual support for each other’s dreams, and the challenges you’ve faced trying to keep that mutual support in spite of external pressures?” We also visited a number of other topics ranging from foreign policy to the My Brother’s Keeper Initiative.

Throughout the discussion, the President seamlessly transitioned between Mr. Obama, loving husband, proud father, former professor, and our Commander in Chief. We reveled at the depth and breadth of his responses and willingness to extend our time to answer a few more ques-



*President Obama meets with the 2015-2016 White House Fellows in the Oval Office.*

tions. At the end of the session, we walked to the Oval Office for a photo together and we were on our way – inspired and determined to make good on the President’s call for us to pay this incredible experience forward.

Personally, meeting President Obama fulfilled a dream I’ve had for some time. As a black male born to a hard-working single mother, I wanted to sit next to the very man who triumphed over similar circumstances to become the first black President and change the course of history. As I sat shoulder-to-shoulder with him, I remembered something my grandmother once told me: “To whom much is given, even more is required.” I remain thankful for this once-in-a-lifetime experience, this “gift,” and will return it to the same community that cared enough to tell a young, fatherless boy that he mattered and, despite his rough start in life, that he could make it to the White House one day.

**BY COREY HARRISON**  
*U.S. Department of Defense*

# A LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Commissioners, Alumni, Fellows, and Friends,

What an incredible summer this has been for the White House Fellows Program! In the past few months, the Fellows traveled on two policy trips, met with a range of incredible leaders, had an impact in their placements, and the Commission selected a new class of Fellows to usher the program through its tenth presidential transition.

In June, the current class of Fellows traveled to New York City and attended a SpaceX launch hosted by NASA at Cape Canaveral. As a part of our Education Program, they had the honor of meeting with leaders such as President Obama, White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Sylvia Mathews Burwell. They also participated in a special event focused on civil rights and the Proposition 8 case hosted by Commissioner Ted Olson and former U.S. Trade Representative Ambassador Ron Kirk. Importantly, through it all, this class made an impact in their placements on issues ranging from increasing broadband access to individuals and families living in public housing to spearheading efforts to make the impending presidential transition go smoothly. A few of their placements are featured in this newsletter and we hope you enjoy reading about their experiences.

This summer, members of the President's Commission on White House Fellowships came together to select the final class of Fellows for this administration. The Commission is made up of dynamic individuals who take their responsibility very seriously and we are grateful for their time and commitment. The Commission selected a strong 2016-2017 class that hails from all around the country and represent a diverse set of professions, including military, business, law, medicine, and local government. We have been fortunate to have great interest from departments, agencies, and offices in hosting Fellows and we look forward to a year of strong placements throughout the Federal government.

While we look forward to bringing in a new group of Fellows, this time of year is always bittersweet as we bid farewell to the current class. On behalf of the fellowship family, I want to offer my sincere congratulations to the 2015-2016 class and their families. We have enjoyed getting to know each of them and we are grateful for their willingness to challenge themselves and each other throughout the year.

As we transition these two groups of Fellows, we look ahead to recruiting the next class. In November 2016, we will open the application portal and we hope you will encourage the exceptional leaders in your lives to apply for the Fellowship. Please stay tuned for opportunities to recruit from your networks in the near future.

Warm regards,

*Jeany*



*The 2015-2016 class of White House Fellows visits the Lillian Wald Houses on the Lower East Side of Manhattan with Shola Olatoye, Chair and CEO of the New York City Housing Authority and building property managers during their policy trip to New York.*

# New York Policy Trip

I am not sure if it was because the upcoming policy trip to New York City was our last policy trip together or because the itinerary was so rich with topics near and dear to our hearts, but the entire class was overflowing with excitement and anticipation as we reviewed the final agenda sitting in our home away from home at the White House Fellows Office at 712 Jackson Place.

With only a few hours of sleep on our first day—thanks to a flight that was delayed five hours—I would have expected us to be operating off fumes by lunch time. But as Simone Beauvoir once said, “there is something in the New York air that makes sleep useless.” I happen to think that “something” is the beauty of New York culture.

And boy did we get a taste! We laughed with Stephen Colbert and cried with the cast from *THE COLOR PURPLE*. Our Late Show experience gave us insight into the focused flexibility required to bring the news, albeit with a comedic twist, into living rooms across the country. Thanks to the gracious support of our very own Commissioner Cheryl Dorsey, we took a short walk over to the Bernard Jacobs’ theater to watch the Tony award-winning *THE COLOR PURPLE*. Some of us had read the novel. Some of us had just seen the movie. All of us were moved to tears. Even a gabster like me can’t find the words to express how meaningful of an experience that was for our class.

The rest of our trip was filled with equally enlightening insights into NYC culture. The one and only Amanda Hesser, another one of our special Commissioners, filled us with both delicious food and delightful company with a panel on entrepreneurship in New York City. White House Fellow alumnus and first responder Brenda Berkman bravely walked us through her front row seat to 9/11. Her visible resilience seemed to reflect the depth of NYC’s soul.

Of course, you can’t talk about New York without talking about business and finance. One of the highlights of our trip was the time we spent with *The New York Times* financial columnist Andrew Ross Sorkin. His candor about the role of media and his storytelling method of sharing financial news was refreshing. Interestingly, Sorkin recently wrote a piece about the impact of the average American’s perception of wealth inequality and its impact on President Obama’s economic

legacy. The divergence in the New York economy was brought to life by our visits to JPMorgan Chase, Loews Corporation, and Tory Burch LLC, all of which stood in heartbreaking contrast with our visit to the Lilian Ward housing projects.

We were intrigued by lessons from U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power on the international rule of law, but I would be remiss as the sole criminal lawyer in our group not to mention the thrilling scope of criminal justice speakers on our itinerary. Our biggest takeaway: invest. It was very apparent the city had invested both dollars and sense in its police force. While the high value new technology in the NYPD was impressive enough to make Google jealous, it was the commonsense use of that technology as a day-to-day resource for police officers that proved most impactful. Beyond technology, the city seemed to effectively leverage its wealth of not-for-profit and federal resources to get things done. We were amazed to hear the same sense of accomplishment in reducing the number of NYC prisoners from Elizabeth Glazer, Director of the Mayor’s Office of Criminal Justice, as we heard from Glenn Martin, Founder and Executive Director of JustLeadershipUSA, and even U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara. It’s rare and rewarding to see government and advocates working together toward a common goal.

In the midst of all of the contrasts in New York, in just three short days, we learned a lifetime’s worth about one thing we all have in common: humanity.

**BY NAOMI DENNIS**

***U.S. Department of Education***



*The 2015-2016 White House Fellows meet with the cast of *THE COLOR PURPLE* in New York City.*

# Placement Report

I've thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity at my State Department fellowship placement this year to meet and learn from a remarkable team of professionals working diligently and resourcefully on our nation's foreign policy issues under the leadership of Secretary of State John F. Kerry.

U.S. support for Central America has been a key area of focus for Vice President Biden, as our government has sought to address underlying factors driving irregular migration of unaccompanied children and families from the region. In support of those efforts, I had the chance to plan and participate in an October 2015 trip by Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Heather Higginbottom to Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. During the visit, she met with the heads of state of all three countries, and as well with other senior government officials, civil society groups, and key stakeholders in the countries' capitals. She also conducted field visits to see U.S. foreign assistance programs in action. While in the region, we had the opportunity to join State Department Acting Assistant Secretary for Western Hemisphere Affairs Mari Carmen Aponte (WHF '79-80), who was then serving as U.S. Ambassador to El Salvador, for a memorable dinner at her residence in San Salvador. *Gracias Embajadora Aponte!*

At an interagency meeting in Washington, DC in late 2015, a colleague from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) reached out with an idea for a joint visit to Colombia by Deputy Secretary Higginbottom and OMB colleagues. The Colombian government had announced significant progress in peace negotiations with the FARC, as both sides sought to end the Western Hemisphere's longest-running conflict. I subsequently had the chance to work closely with OMB, State, and interagency colleagues in planning and carrying out our February 2016 visit to Bogotá and the Bajo Cauca region of Antioquia, a trip that was structured to help the Deputy Secretary and her OMB counterpart explore the budgetary implications of peace accord implementation. The visit was one of many lines of effort in support of a plan that President Obama has entitled "Paz Colombia" (Peace Colombia), a new framework designed to tailor U.S. foreign assistance to support the Colombian government in realizing an enduring peace.

In the latter part of the fellowship year, I've shifted gears to focus on the East Asia-Pacific region. In April 2016, I had the memorable opportunity to participate in a visit by Secretary Ker-

ry to Hiroshima, Japan, in conjunction with the "Group of Seven" ("G-7") Foreign Ministers meeting. The trip was the first to Hiroshima by a cabinet-level official, and preceded President Obama's historic visit the following month. My family and I returned to the United States in the summer before beginning the fellowship after four and a half years in Japan, and the chance to contribute to such a significant event with our Japanese allies was a truly memorable experience.

Since then, I've had the chance to join a U.S.-Japan-South Korea policy planning dialogue in Tokyo led by Director of Policy Planning and Chief of Staff to Secretary Kerry, Jon Finer (WHF '09-10), and to assist with the planning of a trilateral meeting between senior officials from the U.S., Japan, and Australia. Lastly, I've had the opportunity to work on a data analytics initiative to develop a mobile/tablet application to facilitate interagency assessment work abroad, and I hope that we'll see the first in-country pilot following initial beta testing by the end of the summer.

As an active-duty Naval Officer, I look forward to returning to the Department of Defense with many first-hand lessons on leadership and management in a complex, interagency, multinational setting. I'm exceptionally grateful to the many mentors who have made this year such a uniquely rewarding learning experience, from Secretary Kerry and Deputy Secretary Higginbottom, to our wonderful fellowship Director Jenny Kaplan. As they say in Japan, *domo arigato gozaimasu!*

**BY SPENCER ABBOT**  
*U.S. Department of State*



*U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and White House Fellow Spencer Abbot during a Veterans' Day 2015 visit to Norfolk Naval Station, VA.*

# Placement Report

**T**his year, as a White House Fellow placed at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), I have had the best year of my life--and that is stated without an ounce of exaggeration. From the outset, the Administrator, General Charles Bolden, expressed his excitement and dedication to the fellowship experience and has allowed me to be by his side since. Whether fighting for our FY 17 budget on The Hill, welcoming Scott Kelly home, or watching inflatable habitation systems being launched to the International Space Station (ISS), the Administrator has truly opened my eyes to a new side of federal government, the agency's vision on our Journey to Mars, and the importance of 'soft power' when collaborating with our global partners.

My inner explorer is still doing backflips just thinking of our most recent trip to Israel, Jordan, UAE, and Paris. There were several goals of this trip, with the main ones being to sign an umbrella agreement with the UAE on peaceful uses of space, to renew and create new outreach partnerships with NASA's I<sup>2</sup> internship program, to encourage the European Space Agency to extend their support to the ISS through 2024, and most importantly to inspire students and space enthusiasts about Mars! When human missions to Mars begin in two decades, it will be a result of an international effort. The work happening today to build the Space Launch System rocket and Orion spacecraft, the technology tested aboard the International Space Station, the robots already leading the way to Mars, and the teens and pre-teens who are excited by

and engaged in STEM are critical to achieving the goal to send humans to Mars. While in Amman, Jordan, I was brought to tears by the students from across Jordan involved in the NASA-led Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment (GLOBE) Program, an international science and education program that provides students and the public worldwide with the opportunity to participate in data collection and the scientific process. Their presentations to the NASA delegation were long awaited and I felt like a proud parent or teacher in the audience not withholding a single tear of joy.

Being a White House Fellow and future Martian has been more than I ever imagined. The exposure to leadership, policy discussions, fellowship activities, and all of my 'ah ha!' moments throughout the year have allowed me to grow in ways that otherwise would have easily taken another decade. By far, this has been the best year of my life.

**BY LA'SHANDA HOLMES**

*National Aeronautics and Space Administration*



*NASA Administrator Charles Bolden and White House Fellow La'Shanda Holmes visit the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi, UAE.*

# Placement Report

**A**s someone who has a background in working with low income populations in public education, I was excited about the prospect of working at the U.S. Department of the Treasury. The Treasury Department, under Secretary Jack Lew, has really focused on low to moderate income Americans and serving the public as “The People’s Treasury.” To that effect, one of his top priorities has been ensuring access to financial products and services for low income populations, more commonly known as financial inclusion. There are millions of Americans who are unbanked, and underbanked, and the Treasury Department is investigating the barriers to access and working to find solutions. In addition to working on this important initiative, I have also had the chance to bring my love for finding private/public solutions to bear by advancing our work on P3 (Public Private Partnerships) financing of infrastructure projects and Treasury’s starter retirement account, myRA.

In addition to my work on P3s, I have also had the unique experience of briefly supporting Treasury’s initiative to diversify the stories we tell and the people we honor on our currency. I got chills when I found out that we were honoring Harriet Tubman on the front of the twenty-dollar bill. With the current national conversation on race, I was proud of the boldness by our Secretary and Treasurer. We also will honor the women’s suffrage movement on the ten-dollar bill, and the powerful voices of Martin Luther King Jr., Marian Anderson, and Eleanor Roosevelt by featuring

them on the reverse of the five dollar bill. It is a historic moment, and I’m grateful that I was able to witness it in person.

The projects I have worked on have been intriguing and impactful, but I have to say the best part of this year has been the people. The talent at Treasury in Domestic Finance, International Affairs, and Terrorist Financing and Intelligence are some of the smartest and most dedicated people I have ever met. They truly see the connection between our policies and the people on the ground. The culture here is one of partnership, boldness, and possibility, and that leadership comes from the top. It has been an honor to serve at the Treasury Department and I am grateful to have been able to be a part of so many great initiatives and learn so many lessons from Secretary Lew and the entire Treasury team.

**BY MAXEME TUCHMAN**

*U.S. Department of the Treasury*



*U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Jack Lew meets with White House Fellow Maxeme Tuchman at Treasury’s Washington, DC headquarters.*

# Placement Report

**I**n 2015-2016, to serve at the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) is to live in the eye of the political storm and in the middle of a raging debate about the impact of trade on the American economy, jobs, and wages. Not a day goes by without trade in the news cycle.

Last August, I arrived at USTR as an ardent proponent of trade. I believed in the important role trade plays in promoting U.S. interests and values as well as those of our allies, especially least developed countries where I focused much of my career in the Army and private sector and where I witnessed firsthand the transformative impact of trade and investment in uplifting the global poor. In fact, one of my application essays proposed to the President that the U.S. evolve our current trade policy framework in Africa from one based on temporary unilateral tariff preferences for African countries into the U.S. market to a permanent set of reciprocal trade agreements.

Very fortunately, USTR has provided me the tremendous opportunity to spur the U.S. government in a direction consistent with the view expressed in my application essay. Under the leadership of Ambassador Michael Froman, the U.S. Trade Representative and White House Fellows alumnus, I have served as a co-manager on a project to develop policy options for the U.S. to develop a deeper, more reciprocal trade and investment relationship with Africa, which will culminate in the release of a public report in September.

I have also served as a trade negotiator in on-going negotiations between the U.S. and the European Union on the

Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (T-TIP) and recently joined USTR's Office of Congressional Affairs, where I am responsible for liaising with Congress on a broad portfolio of policy issues pertaining to China, agriculture, and services and investment. Collectively, these experiences have exposed me to a fascinating, diverse, and complex set of policy issues.

My placement at USTR has exceeded my very high expectations and taught me invaluable lessons. First, it has affirmed my strong belief in the benefits of trade, while also forcing me to confront legitimate concerns about the impact of changes in technology and globalization on the U.S. economy. Second, it has impressed on me the fundamental importance of articulating narratives that are clear, concise, and emotionally resonant with the American public on matters of policy. Third, it has provided me a profound respect for U.S. trade negotiators, some of the most talented, hardest-working, and most principled individuals that I have ever encountered.

**BY ERIK MALMSTROM**

*Office of the U.S. Trade Representative*



*White House Fellow Erik Malmstrom at USTR's Washington, DC headquarters.*

# Education Report

## SPEAKER SEMINARS

- ◆ President of the United States Barack Obama
- ◆ Judge Richard Leon and John Podesta
- ◆ Dr. Lonnie Bunch, Director of the National Museum of African American History
- ◆ John McCain, U.S. Senator
- ◆ David Brooks, *The New York Times*
- ◆ Sylvia Mathews Burwell, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services
- ◆ Karl Rove, Former White House Deputy Chief of Staff
- ◆ Jeffrey Zients, Director of the National Economic Council
- ◆ Alexander Macgillivray, U.S. Deputy Chief Technology Officer
- ◆ Elizabeth Littlefield, President of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation
- ◆ Julian Castro, U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development
- ◆ Sally Yates, U.S. Deputy Attorney General
- ◆ Denis McDonough, White House Chief of Staff
- ◆ Jack Lew, U.S. Secretary of the Treasury
- ◆ General Joseph Dunford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
- ◆ Keith Ellison, U.S. Congressman
- ◆ David Ferriero, Archivist of the United States
- ◆ Shaun Donovan, Director of the Office of Management and Budget
- ◆ Dr. Vanessa Kerry, CEO of Seed Global Health
- ◆ David Rubenstein, Co-Founder and Co-CEO, The Carlyle Group

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE NEW YORK CITY POLICY TRIP

- ◆ Meeting with Andrew Tisch and others from Loews Corporation on Economic Security, Energy Security, and Finance
- ◆ Meeting with Andres Ross Sorkin, *The New York Times*
- ◆ Lunch with Christopher Jackson, *Hamilton*, and Margo Lion, Broadway Producer
- ◆ Meeting with Glenn Martin, Founder and President, JustLeadershipUSA.
- ◆ Taping of *The Late Show* with Stephen Colbert and Meeting with Chris Licht, Executive Producer
- ◆ Viewing of THE COLOR PURPLE and Post-Show Discussion with Cast
- ◆ Meeting with Elizabeth Glazer, Director of the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice
- ◆ Meeting with Police Commissioner William Bratton, New York City Police Department
- ◆ Tour of the World Trade Center Memorial with First Responder and WHF Alumna Brenda Berkman
- ◆ Meetings at JP Morgan Chase with Jamie Dimon, CEO, and Matthew Zames, COO
- ◆ Meeting with Preet Bharara, U.S. Attorney
- ◆ Panel and Dinner at Food52 Hosted by Amanda Hesser, CEO and WHF Commissioner
- ◆ Breakfast at Bloomberg Philanthropies and Meetings with Kate Levin, Principal, and Kelly Larson, Program Director

- ◆ Meeting with Shola Olatoye, CEO, NYC Housing Authority
- ◆ Meeting with Holly Leicht, Regional Administrator for NY and NJ, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
- ◆ Meeting with Brigitte Kleine, President of Tory Burch LLC
- ◆ Meeting with Richard Buery, Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives
- ◆ Meeting with U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power

## SPECIAL EVENTS

- ◆ WHFFA Transition Panel
- ◆ Jeffersonian Dinners at the Home of David Moore and Stefanie Sanford
- ◆ Briefing by the National Committee on United States-China Relations
- ◆ Courageous Leadership for Equity and Inclusion Training
- ◆ The Case on 8 Event at Gibson Dunn
- ◆ 2016 Evening of Fellowships Event at the National Academy of Medicine
- ◆ Placement Week Dinner at the Home of Deborah Harmon
- ◆ WHFFA Transition Dinner at the Army Navy Club

## COMMUNITY SERVICE

- ◆ Experiential Learning with Community ONE
- ◆ Mentoring Event at Urban Alliance
- ◆ Service Event with The Mission Continues



# Help us recruit the next class!

There are still many ways you can get involved with the program. 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
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.

## Thank you from the Fellows Office

- ◆ We would like to thank our Summer 2016 interns, Jacob Binder and Natalie Omary. They were instrumental in our selection and placement efforts and we will miss them very much!
- ◆ We thank Ted Olson and Ambassador Ron Kirk for hosting The Case on 8 Event at Gibson Dunn.
- ◆ We appreciate the Commissioners and their support for the White House Fellows Program and thank them for their efforts to select the 2016-2017 class at this year's Selection Weekend.
- ◆ We would like to thank our numerous hosts during the New York policy trip for their incredible contributions to the Fellows' experience.
- ◆ We would like to extend our gratitude to David Moore and Stefanie Sanford for hosting a dinner for the incoming class of Fellows during Placement Week.
- ◆ We are thankful to Deborah Harmon and Dr. Robert Seder for graciously hosting a dinner for the incoming and outgoing class of Fellows during Placement Week.
- ◆ We are grateful to the placement principals and White House Liaisons for their support of the Fellows throughout the year and for aiding us in this year's placement process.
- ◆ Finally, but importantly, we extend a genuine thank you to the St. Regis Hotel and its staff for hosting Selection Weekend.



*Commissioner Ted Olson and Ambassador Ron Kirk with the 2015-2016 White House Fellows at The Case on 8 Event at Gibson Dunn.*



*The 2015-2016 White House Fellows meet with Robert Cabana, former NASA astronaut and Director of the Kennedy Space Center, during their policy trip to Cape Canaveral, FL.*



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

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