

Inside the White House: Jewel James

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Jewel James is one of the political rising stars in Washington who in her early thirties has the ear of the President and Vice President. Her work experience includes working on Capitol Hill as support staff for the Congressional Black Caucus for a few years when Congressman Elijah Cummings and Congressman Mel Watt headed the group of black federal lawmakers. Just like Maryland Congressman Cummings and North Carolina Congressman Watt who have ascended to higher rankings, her diligence and hard work continues to make an impact on the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue. At the White House, her current job title is Special Assistant to President Barack Obama and Deputy Director of Intergovernmental Affairs.

James works with the Presidential team that fosters relationships with state and local officials from: Governors and State Legislators to Mayors and to Attorneys General. “One of my big responsibilities is just making sure that we are working as effectively and efficiently as possible between the Federal government and state government.” Her job is essentially to help advance the President’s agenda to locales. The major agenda items are “working with states” for “creating jobs.”

Just recently, James coordinated a conference call with State Legislators from around the country on the Affordable Care Act. “Open enrollment begins October 1 for the health insurance marketplaces.” James feels for the millions of Americans who currently benefit from the ACA and the millions of American families who will gain access to affordable health care, “our work with state and local governments is essential.” Because she works closely with states, she has more time with Vice President Biden. The Vice President enjoys continual conversations with the nation’s Governors on various topics.

James job demands her time. It is common for James to work 12-hour days and 7 days a week on pressing issues important to the President’s agenda including items that affect states, like gun control, and immigration. She learned perseverance and diligence at an early age as an orphan who put herself through school and then worked the hallowed corridors of Washington to rise through the ranks. “Being here [at the White House] every day is impactful” James reveals. Her road to the District was neither easy or privileged.

James recalls, “I moved to DC when I was 16 to go to Howard [University]. I moved here as an

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orphan.” She did not have the support of parents nor did she have a high school diploma or enough money for a four year ride to get her college degree. “I didn’t have my parents to lean on...[I had] just enough money to get through my freshman year of college and I didn’t know what I was going to do after that.” James reflects on the other side of the struggle to where she stands now. James says, “Besides faith, the reason why I made it this far was because people believed and invested in me. She feels fulfilled by working for and with a President who strives to level the playing field for kids by providing access to opportunity and investing in them.

Overall James believes her experience is a tremendous honor especially since she credits her rise inside Washington to those people who believed and invested in her.