

FAMU President Excluded From White House Summit

Contributed by Kristen Swilley -- Black College Wire
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Security problem keeps Ammons and other HBCU presidents out of meeting

After waiting in the White House security area for nearly two hours, Florida A&M University President James Ammons was denied entry to a conference with President Obama because his Social Security number did not clear.

A White House official says that a typical meeting on Monday would require notification by Friday at noon. However, President Ammons did not receive notification of the event until Friday evening when he responded with his information. Ammons traveled to Washington, D.C. Sept. 12, to discuss the role of historically black colleges and universities with Obama and other university leaders. As he prepared to enter the White House, he received the news that he would not be allowed access to the conference along with representatives from several other schools.

North Carolina A&T, Norfolk State, Claflin, St. Paul's and Voorhees were among the schools whose representatives were also denied entry.

Though nothing in Ammons background prevented him from accessing the White House, there was not enough time for the information to process. "They took our social security numbers and they emailed them to someone in the White House security system," Ammons said. "All of the other presidents whose names were on the list were admitted. The others of us stood outside the gate waiting for them to say 'come on in.' Almost two hours later they came and told us they were sorry and that we could not be cleared. That was it."

Though Ammons did not receive official confirmation from the White House before his departure, he was told that as a registrant of the conference he would be admitted. The total cost of Ammons' trip was \$1,207, which consisted of E&G funds.

A representative from the White House could not be reached at the time of the initial publication (Sept.) for an explanation of this incident.

"It was unfortunate that we didn't get to hear the President's message and get to talk with him," Ammons said. "I wanted to say to him what an outstanding job was done on healthcare reform that also included the increase in the Pell Grant and the increase in funding for historically black colleges and universities through Title 3."

He also mentioned the benefits that FAMU will receive over the next decade through the White House initiative on HBCUs.

"FAMU is going to get an additional 10 million through a program that has been stabilized and was temporary and now we're going to get that \$2 million a year for the next five years."

"If I were Ammons I'd be pretty upset, but it's cool that the provost and the ex-president were there to represent FAMU," said Sydney Kendrick, 18, a first year pre-nursing student from Daytona Beach. "It is the President of the United States, so I'm just glad we had representation."

Despite Ammons' absence, Florida A&M was not void of representation. Several members of the executive staff of the office of the president attended the conference.

Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, Cynthia Hughes Harris, was able to participate and said the conference addressed several vital issues.

"I certainly learned a lot about how we can continue to implement our goals towards retention of our students including their ability to not only enter the university but to successfully matriculate and graduate on time," Harris said.

"We addressed many of the issues that are important to FAMU, retention being one, globalization of our curriculum being another," Harris said. "We had the opportunity to put our goals in the context of (Obama) and Congress and the nation. We will be contributing to the President's goals, to the nation's goals, FAMU's goals and the other goals of HBCUs."

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