

POLITICS

## Obama and Black Caucus reach common ground

By [theGrio](#)  
3:53 PM on 12/15/2011

By Shawna Thomas  
NBC News



It wasn't on the president's public schedule, but Tuesday morning he and Valerie Jarrett held a meeting with the Chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus Rep. Emanuel Cleaver (D-MO) and 12 African-American business leaders on job creation. Chairman Cleaver remarked, "I thought that the meeting was as good a meeting as I've ever had with a president and I've been going to the White House for meetings with presidents since the early 1980's" dismissing talk of the occasionally icy relationship between black members of Congress and the White House.

According to a White House official, the group met for about an hour and the president focused on elements of the stalled-in-Congress American Jobs Act that could benefit the African-American community.

According to Cleaver, it was a "feet on the ground meeting" with all of the participants focused on what the president could do to encourage minority hiring that didn't involve congressional action.

Robert Johnson, chairman of The RLJ Companies (full disclosure: He's also a CNBC contributor) said, "This was not a meeting to talk about political strategy or bemoan the opposition of the Republican Party."

While it is unclear if the multiple presidential executive actions over the last two months under the "We Can't Wait" banner have resonated with the general population, Cleaver said the leaders in the room Tuesday had taken the message to heart. "Everybody realizes that Washington is a city that is broken and nothing of substance will get through the legislative process. So the hope is that things can be done through the power of the Oval Office," the CBC Chairman said. All of the ideas presented during the meeting were thought to be ones that could be implemented by the White House or one of the agencies without congressional approval.

Weldon Latham, a Senior Partner at Jackson Lewis who was also a participant, said everyone in the room, including the President, came into the meeting with the dismal unemployment rate of African-Americans on their minds.

According to the latest Department of Labor data, African-Americans were unemployed at a rate of 15.5 percent in November of this year, compared to an overall unemployment rate for the country of 8.6 percent. And unlike the overall rate which saw a percentage decline last month, the jobless rate for blacks went up.

During the meeting, Latham complimented the president on his recent executive action that mandates a "government-wide initiative to promote diversity and inclusion in the Federal workforce." Latham also said the group, "suggested another number of actions that he might want to consider" because ""motivating the federal government to be a leader" when it comes to diversity and inclusion should be a priority.

Latham said this was his first small sit down with the president, but had met with Valerie Jarrett on numerous occasions to talk about jobs and issues in the African-American community. He also dismissed a question about tension between black

leaders and the president. "The fact that the president was sitting there with the Chairman of the Black Caucus and ten or more...African-American business leaders across the country...he is doing what the Caucus would like him to do."

Latham was mum on his suggestions to the president, but Johnson said he spoke broadly about getting corporate America to adopt what he calls the "RLJ Rule" It's described as similar to the "National Football League's Rooney Rule, which afforded minority candidates seeking head-coaching or general manager positions within the League to be considered before a final hiring decision."

The White House promised they would follow up after the meeting and have already been back in touch with Rep. Cleaver. "We left the White House feeling very good about having presented solid suggestions to the president and shortly thereafter the White House called us to make sure that we sent them a written compilation of what those suggestions were," the Congressman said.

The overall message from the president according to Latham: "I have to solve all of these urgent problems. Hopefully if I'm around for another term we'll be able to accomplish new goals."

<http://www.thegrio.com/politics/obama-and-black-caucus-reach-common-ground.php>