

Beat: Politics

VOICE OF A SENIOR POLICY ADVISOR IN HEALTHCARE FOR THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC COUNCIL

MUSLIM & AMERICAN-VOICE FROM WHITE HOUSE

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USPA NEWS - Here is the story of Alefiyah Mesiwala, Senior Policy Advisor in Healthcare for the National Economic Council. She is a dedicated public servant who have faced discrimination and found hope in the people she works alongside and the work she does every day on behalf of the American people....

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I was born and raised in Maryland, not too far from D.C. Growing up, I played basketball, loved traveling and hanging with my family and friends, just like any other kid. But after the heinous attacks on 9/11, being a head-covering 8th grader would no longer be the same.

There were days when my identity as a Muslim American became a struggle ““ I was glared at, cursed and spit at in public and in school. It was the tenets of my faith, the ideals of this country, the encouragement of those around me, and the determination to have my voice heard that carried me through and gave me the courage to pursue public service. I learned through hardship, that every challenge is in fact an opportunity to become stronger. Never would I have imagined as a young girl who was once mocked and called names that I’d end up working at the White House wearing a hijab in the West Wing.

That kind of ability to overcome any challenge is the attitude I take toward the level of anti-Muslim rhetoric we’re seeing today. This country has overcome and continues to strive to overcome every challenge, no matter how long it takes. The Civil Rights movement proves that. People had to struggle and suffer to work together and raise their voices to bring about change. Hearing the political discourse and hateful language certainly has negative consequences, but it is also the spark that has empowered me and others like me to speak up and work together in ways we may not have before.

My passion has always been in global social entrepreneurship and empowerment of women and their voices and I am proud to have been able to work on these issues here at the White House. It was the President's message of hope and change that inspired me to pursue an internship at the White House, and it was interning in Correspondence and reading letters that made me realize how important every voice was, including those of Muslim Americans.

I believe if you work hard and if you play by the rules, you can make it if you try in America -- no matter who you are or how you pray. It's how a young girl -- once mocked and called names -- can pursue her dream and proudly serve her country as a head-covering Bengali Muslim American woman in the White House.

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