



KAY COLES JAMES

PRESIDENT, HERITAGE FOUNDATION

NationalJournal

Life in Brief

Hometown: Portsmouth, VA

Current Residence: Midlothian, VA

Education

- BA, Hampton University, 1971

Family:

- Husband Charles E. James, Sr. is Director of the Office of Civil Rights at the US Department of Transportation
- Three adult children

Work history

- President, Heritage Foundation, 2018-Present
- President/Founder, Gloucester Institute, 2001-Present
- Senior Partner, JC Watts Co, 2006-Unknown
- Senior EVP at MZM, Inc., 2005-unknown
- Director, U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2001-05
- Dean, Regent University School of Govt., 1996-Unknown
- Virginia Secretary of Health & Human Resources, 1994-96
- SVP, Family Research Council, unknown dates
- Associate Director, White House Office of National Drug Control Policy, 1991-93
- Asst. Secretary, Public Affairs at U.S. HHS, 1989-91
- Director of Public Affairs, National Right to Life Committee, 1985-88
- Fairfax County School Board and State Board, 1993-Unknown

Past and Present Board Memberships and Advisory Roles:

- Member, Advanced Technology External Advisory Council
- Commissioner, Women's Suffrage Centennial Commission
- Trustee, The Heritage Foundation
- Board Member: Salvation Army, Phycor, Inc., PNC, Amerigroup, and Magellan Health, Inc.

Quick Summary

Conservative reformer whose experience growing up in poverty played profound role motivating entry to public policy and subsequent advocacy. After decades in Virginia and federal GOP policy circles, focuses on shaping a new generation of conservative leaders

- Cites formative early experiences in public housing with a mother on welfare and an alcoholic father as fundamentally shaping views on importance of family, value of education, and need for welfare reform
- Strong ties to Capitol Hill and conservative policymakers through work in multiple presidential administrations and conservative advocacy
- Active role mentoring young people with emphasis on education and self-sufficiency
- Social conservatism rooted in devout Christian faith
- Key outside influence quarterbacking advocacy efforts for eventual passage of 2017 tax bill

Approach and Motivations

Reform-minded, merit-based problem solver

- Favors policies that reduce role and size of government at state and federal levels
- Argues for focusing less on social safety nets and more on merit-based incentives
- Refers to herself as a solutionist rather than identifying ideologically as a conservative

Cites education and family as foundation

- Highlights influence of extended family members who raised her to value education
- Fought for policies that promote family and education as remedies instead of government
- Uses her platform and expansive influence to mentor young people and instill value of education as a means to success

Policy Positions and Areas of Focus**Conservative policy views shaped by formative years and emphasis on education****Urban Policy Reforms – Cites firsthand knowledge of failed urban policies**

- Criticized what she views as liberal policies for not addressing urban poverty and crime
- Believes encouraging two-parent families with a mother and father in the household is crucial to curbing drug abuse and violent crime
- Believes there is an overreliance on welfare in urban areas and that states should have the ability to reform their welfare systems

Welfare Reform – One of the top policy issues that she has personal experience with

- Prioritized welfare reform as Virginia's health secretary
- Believes welfare generally needs reformed to encourage less dependency and more self-sufficiency
- Designed and implemented Virginia's welfare reform that set strict time limits and imposed work requirements for welfare recipients
- Proposed increased child-support enforcement

Tax Cuts – Proponent of the 2017 tax cuts signed by President Trump

- Supported tax cuts as a mechanism to boost economic growth and create new jobs
- President Trump credited her with helping pass the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act

Pro-Life Movement – Drawn to pro-life issues from desire to protect the vulnerable

- Chief spokeswoman for National Right to Life Committee in the 80s
- Counseled young women against abortion as a volunteer at a crisis pregnancy center

Education – Issue of interest throughout career

- As a member of the VA Board of Education, disagreed with federal Goals 2000 education reform program because she believed it could threaten state autonomy over policy

- Supports school choice policies that give parents more decision-making power
- Cites DC Opportunity Scholarship Program as an example of an effective voucher program

Free Trade – Advocate of less government intervention in US trade deals

- Does not think tariffs are a conservative policy; believes that unrestricted free trade is one of the best ways to maintain a strong economy
- Encouraged President Trump to abandon use of tariffs because, in her view, they amount to a tax increase on working families
- Supports USMCA despite its inclusion of minimum wage requirements, which she describes as trade barriers

Core Communities**Virginia GOP – Longtime member who forged connections over several decades**

- Friend of former Senator George Allen who appointed her to his cabinet, featured her in his senate campaign ads, and introduced her during her confirmation hearing for OPM
- Has known former Governor Bob McDonnell for several years, and was appointed by him to VCU's board of visitors
- Virginia GOP created an award in her honor, the Kay Coles James Award, given to an individual who makes significant efforts to expand diversity in the Virginia GOP

Conservative Advocacy Community – Robust network of advocates

- Mentored conservative activist and commentator CJ Pearson and CEO of Concerned Women for America, Penny Nance
- Strong ties to Focus on the Family and is close friends with Chief of Staff Joel Vaughan
- Matt Schlapp, Chair of CPAC, is a friend and close associate

Core Communities Cont.

- Tiffany M. Moore, SVP of Consumer Tech Association and former Bush 43 staffer considers her to be a mentor
- Maintains strong ties to pro-life community, including National Right to Life, from her involvement pro-life issues throughout her career

GOP Hill Leaders and Influencers – Relationships with former members of Congress

- Maintains strong friendships with several former GOP leaders in Congress including former Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) and former Senators Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Jim DeMint (R-SC)
- Doug Stafford, Chief Strategist for Sen. Rand Paul, is an ally and friend
- Michael Steele, Fmr. Lt. Governor of Maryland and RNC Chairman, is a personal friend

Selected Publications

Wrote about her life growing up and personal growth; commentary focuses on conservative issue advocacy

Books – Authored three memoirs about personal growth and success

- *Never Forget: The Riveting Story of One Women's Journey from Public Housing to the Corridors of Power*, 1994
- *Transforming America From the Inside Out*, 1995
- *What I Wish I'd Known Before I Got Married*, 2001

Editorial – Publishes opinion pieces boosting conservative policies

- "[Conservatives want to hear about new success in State of the Union](#)," *The Hill*, January 2019
- "[I wanted to help Google make AI more responsible. Instead I was treated with hostility](#)," *The Washington Post*, April 2019
- "[Tax cuts only help the wealthy, right? American paychecks show otherwise](#)," *Fox News*, July 2018

Financial Disclosures and Donations

Donates infrequently to Republican candidates from Virginia

Federal – Select VA candidates

- \$1,500 – Dave Brat for House (R-VA)
- \$2,500 – George Allen for Senate (R-VA)

State – Select VA candidates, focused on governorship

- \$2,500 – Ed Gillespie for Governor (R-VA)
- \$3,000 – Ken Cuccinelli for Governor (R-VA)
- \$250 – Amanda Chase for State Senate (R-VA)

Media Appearances

Favors a mix of traditional and new media and often sits down with conservative outlets

Television – Discusses her life and career as well as being voice of Heritage on cable news

- [C-SPAN](#): Touched on life, career, and what shaped her conservative views, August 2019
- [Fox Business](#): Discussed President Trump's progress ahead of State of the Union, January 2018

Online – Talks about formative years and views on conservatism

- [The Stream](#): Interview with conservative publication discussing how tragedy shaped her belief system, December 2018
- [The Hugh Hewitt Show](#): Discussed views on conservatism and leading the Heritage Foundation, February 2019

Speaking Engagements

Often gives advice to younger generations and speaks about how Christian faith has influenced her life

- Speaker at Project 2 Empower Leaders Conference about mentoring the next generation in principles of limited government, September 2019
- Q&A with Michael Lindsay of Gordon College Convocation on faith and her life story, November 2014

Profiles Others Have Written

- Lola Fadulu: "[The First Black Woman to Lead the Heritage Foundation](#)," *The Atlantic*, December 2018

Info From Formative Years

Deeply influenced by family upbringing

- Grew up in public housing
- Attending an HBCU (Hampton University) was a transformative experience and exposed her to black culture, something she later expanded on by founding the Gloucester Institute
- Mother's "monumental faith" inspired her to religious beliefs
- Niece's overdose was influential life event that she attributed to urban culture

Family Background

- Born in Portsmouth, VA and lived in a public housing unit
- One of six children
- Father, Bernard Coles, struggled with alcohol abuse, causing her mother to leave him
- Husband, Charles, was director of state personnel and training under Gov. George Allen and is now the Director of the Office of Civil Rights at the Department of Transportation