

PROFILES IN CITIZENSHIP: RAHM EMANUEL



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Rahm Emanuel must be a master of federal relations. The mayor of Chicago since May 2011, he left a position as President Barack Obama's chief of staff in the White House to run for office. Emanuel had worked for the national government before, as a policy adviser for Bill Clinton, and he was a member of Congress, representing a district in Illinois, when we interviewed him in 2005, on a busy day between votes in the House.

The clock on the wall buzzed intermittently, signifying an imminent vote in the U.S. House of Representatives. Rep. Rahm Emanuel didn't want to miss it, and as he chatted

with us, one part of his mind was calculating exactly how much longer he could talk before heading to the House floor from his office in the Longworth House Office Building.

But part of his attention was wholly focused on recounting the course his career in public life had taken, this son of an immigrant doctor in Chicago who became a student of child psychology in college, then a player in Chicago politics, a fundraiser for the Clinton campaign in 1992, a senior presidential adviser with an office next to the Oval Office (and, reportedly, the model for Josh Lyman in the television show *The West Wing*), an investment banker, and now (2005, remember) a member of Congress and chair of the DCCC—the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.

And all this before he had turned forty-five years old. It should have been astounding, but it wasn't. Emanuel seems to live his life at a faster pace than the rest of us, packing more in and pushing more limits in his impatience and fervor to get things done. He even talks fast, answering questions by telling stories, leaving his listeners to draw their own conclusions as he moves quickly on to his next idea.

Maybe that passion and drive come from his Chicago childhood, where he and his two brothers would read the newspapers to prepare for dinner-table conversation with their parents. The family went to civil rights rallies (his mom ran Chicago CORE—the Congress for Racial Equality), they went to cultural events, and they argued politics at the top of their lungs. (It's an Eastern European-Jewish family thing, Emanuel says. "The decibel level of eighty is probably your normal conversation mode.")

In one memorable high-octane family debate in the sixties, Emanuel's mother

and maternal grandfather got into a huge argument over a man named Wallace, whom young Rahm took to be Alabama governor George Wallace. Nope, his dad told him, the argument was over Henry Wallace, circa 1948. His family was arguing passionately over a political controversy twenty years old, as if it had just taken place yesterday.

Those are some serious political genes, and they propelled Emanuel into Chicago politics, where he worked closely with Mayor Richard Daley and Senator Paul Simon, and then into Clinton's 1992 campaign for the presidency.

How did he get to the White House while still in his thirties? "I was thirty, thirty-one, single, and I figured you want to do politics and you want to play for the big leagues, the presidential is it. . . . I wanted to be in the White House." So he signed on as a fundraiser for the campaign, and when, against all odds, Clinton won, Emanuel found himself right where he wanted to be.

Okay, so he's clearly driven and goal oriented and ambitious, but it does not appear to be power or, at least, not power for its own sake that drives him. He is dedicated to bringing about a certain community-based vision of society, and the White House was the best platform from which to do it. "In politics and policy [being in the White House] is the Super Bowl. And so there are things that I care about and if you want to make an impact, that's a place you can make a big impact." And a big impact is exactly what he had as he worked on welfare reform, children's health insurance, the Crime Bill, the assault weapons ban, NAFTA, and the balanced budget.

He made the same impact as a representative from Illinois and the guy who took on the job, via the DCCC, of