

Robert Zakon a White House Presidential Innovation Fellow



IEEE Senior Member and tech entrepreneur Robert Zakon recently completed a year of public service in Washington, D.C. as a White House Presidential Innovation Fellow. Zakon's tenure bridged two administrations, and encompassed work with the U.S. Department of the Treasury, Department of Defense, and the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), among several other inter-agency initiatives.

The Presidential Innovation Fellows program brings the principles, values, and practices of the innovation economy into government by pairing talented, diverse technologists and innovators with top civil-servants and change-makers working at the highest levels of the federal government to tackle some of our nation's biggest challenges. Established in 2012 and signed into law through the TALENT Act in the last Congress, this highly selective program has included 112 fellows over the past five years from organizations such as Google, Microsoft, Facebook, and IDEO.

At Treasury, Zakon worked in the development of policy and assessment strategies around financial and emerging technology

innovations, such as blockchain and distributed ledger, and their potential impact on the financial sector. As an innovator-in-residence within Treasury's Office of Critical Infrastructure Protection and Compliance Policy, he explored ways to enhance governance around cybersecurity in the financial services sector, and facilitating cross-agency innovation efforts.

As an adviser to several OSTP initiatives, Zakon worked to provide government transparency and access across the open data and science communities, and coordinated sharing among the government's leading innovators. Other activities included being a mentor for #HackThePayGap, a hack-a-thon exploring ways to eliminate the gender pay gap, serving as a product strategy trainer for agile digital procurement, and lecturing at the National Defense University on the future of cyber security, artificial intelligence, machine learning, and big data.

As noted about Zakon in a letter from former President Barack Obama, "With talent and creativity, you've helped advance our mission to reimagine public service and build a tomorrow of expanded opportunity and greater possibility for all."

Zakon is a graduate of Case Western Reserve University, and resides in the Mount Washington Valley of New Hampshire with his wife and two sons.