

the CHICAGO NETWORK

Connecting Chicago's Women Leaders

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**Valerie Jarrett Recalls Key Moments from the White House at
The Chicago Network Luncheon**

***Former Senior Advisor to President Obama Asks Men to “Do Better,” Citing Importance
of Equal Pay and Other Working Family Priorities***

Chicago, March 31, 2017—Speaking to a sold-out audience of more than 1,600 corporate and civic leaders at The Chicago Network’s 28th annual Women in the Forefront Luncheon held at the Hilton Chicago today, Valerie Jarrett, the former Senior Advisor to President Barack Obama, recalled her most memorable days in the White House came with the passage of the Affordable Care Act and the Supreme Court’s 2015 ruling affirming marriage equality. Now, as she looks ahead, “I am optimistic about our future. There are so many people around the country doing incredible work that I have confidence. I learned to take the long view from President Obama.”

In a candid discussion with longtime friend and former White House colleague Susan Sher, a central theme was the importance of creating flexible and inclusive workplaces – and the role that men must play. “The tone has to start at the top,” Jarrett said, with a recognition that equal pay for equal work, affordable child care, and paid leave are essential programs. “These are not just women’s issues anymore, these are working family priorities. Employers who get this and who invest in their workers not only attract the best talent, but they retain the best talent. We can no longer afford to leave half of our talent on the sidelines.” When asked by Sher about her advice to men in workplace on supporting and retaining female talent, Jarrett’s two-word response was, “Do better.”

Jarrett also cautioned women about setting expectations to “have it all.” She said: “My position on that is evolving as I get older. You can have it all, but not at the same time. Be realistic, pace yourself. Life should be an adventure – it’s okay to zig and zag!”

Kate Bensen, President and CEO of The Chicago Network, noted in her introduction of the speakers, the shared history of Sher and Jarrett, beginning in Chicago's City Hall in 1989, where they recruited Michelle Robinson – and their subsequent relationship with the Obamas. While working together at the University of Chicago Medical Center, they recruited Michelle (Robinson) Obama, and all three were reunited at the White House in 2011. Both Jarrett and Sher have been members of The Chicago Network, and Sher is now the Senior Advisor to the President of the University of Chicago.

Jarrett's bond with the Obama's was forged over initial meetings trying to woo the young lawyer, Robinson, whose resume had been passed along by Sher, against the early hesitation of her fiancée and community organizer, Barack Obama. A lengthy dinner, during which Obama and Jarrett discussed their early lives abroad and their appreciation for the United States, sealed the deal, Jarrett recalled. Just as Jarrett was successful in wooing Michelle Robinson early in her career, President-elect Obama prevailed on Jarrett to put aside her interest to run for his vacant US Senate seat in Illinois and join his new administration. "You will feel a part of something and be involved in the issues you care about," she said. "He was right."

Jarrett drew upon her personal and professional relationships with the Obamas, including her eight years in the White House, and offered career and management advice for women and men. Jarrett, who comes from an accomplished family that includes a doctor, early childhood advocate, and architect, passed along wisdom from her parents that proved especially useful as she navigated her own distinguished career in the public and private sectors. "My parents taught me to stay true to my values, pursue my passion, take risks," she said.

Looking forward, Jarrett has plans to speak around the country and write a book. She also will be involved in helping the Obamas develop the vision for their new center in Hyde Park, which, she said, "will be more than a library; it will be a platform for solving big problems."

The Luncheon was chaired by Kathryn Sullivan, Chair of The Chicago Network's Board of Directors and CEO, Employer and Individual Local Markets for UnitedHealthcare. Sullivan expressed The Network's appreciation for the sponsors of the 2017 luncheon: Premier Sponsor – Discover Financial Services, for the fourth consecutive year, and Platinum Sponsors –

Allstate Insurance, JPMorgan, Kirkland & Ellis, McKinsey & Co., NiSource, The Northridge Group and UnitedHealthcare.

The Network's luncheon was preceded by the third-annual Launch Pad for Women Senior Leaders, a conference for high potential women leaders sponsored by BMO Harris Bank, with backing from Deloitte and Zurich.

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The Chicago Network is an organization of Chicago's leading professional women, who connect with each other for professional and personal growth, advance civic, business, and philanthropic communities, and inspire and support the next generation of women leaders. For more stories and video content from the 2017 Women in the Forefront Luncheon, please visit www.thechicagonetwork.org