

CAPITOL FILE

6 D.C. Power Women on Challenges, Opportunities, and Success

By elizabeth e. thorp

Elite D.C. dames dish on opportunities, challenges, inspiration, and success in Washington.



Ambassador Capricia Marshall, Betsy Fischer Martin, Valerie Jarrett, Gina Adams, and Katherine Bradley thrive as top-tier professional women in DC.

Our nation's capital is chock-full of influential people. You can't ride the Red line or run into Starbucks without rubbing elbows with a Washington VIP. From CEOs to administration officials, diplomats to

philanthropic leaders, there is no shortage of powerful people in our region, and a good many of them are women.

Capitol File gathered five of the most high-level and inspiring women in DC from diverse backgrounds for an intimate lunch discussion on how these women are impacting the District and beyond. Participants of our discussion included: Gina Adams, corporate vice president of government affairs at Federal Express; Katherine Bradley, president of CityBridge Foundation; Betsy Fischer Martin, senior executive producer and managing editor of NBC News Political Programming; Valerie Jarrett, senior advisor to President Barack Obama; and Capricia Marshall, ambassador and former chief of protocol at the State Department. The following are highlights from our discussion.



The women sit down to lunch at Fiola Mare in Washington Harbor.

BEST DAYS IN DC

Capricia, you've been in Washington for years. What's been your best day?

Capricia Marshall: The day I met President Mandela in the White House was amazing because I felt an

aura around him. But on the day I was sworn in as chief of protocol, with my husband and my son standing next to me along with some special friends, my heart was just so filled. It was where I had always wanted to be. I'm first-generation Mexican American and Croatian American. Neither of my parents finished high school, let alone went on to college or graduate school. They never dreamed they would have a daughter in the White House who would be chief of protocol. But there were so many languages spoken in our house and in my neighborhood. I felt so comfortable among those people from far away places so this [appointment] was a wonderful joy. I am forever grateful for this opportunity... it was a fulfillment of a lifetime of dreams.

Valerie Jarrett: Inauguration Days don't count, so my next best day was when the Affordable Care Act passed. An enormous amount of work went into crafting that piece of legislation and trying to figure out how we could get bipartisan support for it. Everyone was so exhausted. We'd been working for weeks, so I decided to go home and watch the vote on television. Susan Sher, who had been the first lady's chief of staff, lived across the hall from me. We made popcorn, put on our pajamas, and we were sitting in front of the television when the phone rang. It was the president's assistant, who said, "The president would like for everybody who worked on the legislation to come back and watch the vote together." So Susan and I got dressed, went back to the White House, and watched the vote, and it was such a special moment.

Betsy, you've been with NBC in different roles for 22 years. What was your best day in DC?

Betsy Fischer Martin: For me—and for any journalist—it's when there is a ton of news breaking. There is an exciting atmosphere. Even though it wasn't in Washington, I would say Election Night 2000. Florida. Florida. Florida. [Laughs] It was memorable because I was with Tim [Russert] as we were getting the returns in. It was all-night reporting that we were doing on-air, as things were happening, until the crew came in the next morning to do the *Today* show.

Gina, you were born and raised in DC. What's been your best day here?

Gina Adams: I grew up in southeast Washington, I went to DC public schools, and I lived in public housing. I've had thousands of fantastic days in Washington. I have to say that my best was when I walked into the White House to meet the president. The chairman [of FedEx] put me on an airline commission, and it was great meeting all of those important industry CEOs. But when I had to go to the White House and walk through those doors, I was calling my mother... [calling] everyone! Everybody was so proud and excited. To walk through those doors, then meet a president—Bill Clinton at the time—was pretty special, too.

Katherine, you also have been here working with your husband, David Bradley, to build the Advisory Board Company. What was your best day?

Katherine Bradley: You think of these pinnacle days, when you build the companies and they go public. Those are incredible times, but now I've been working in the nonprofit field on education reform for 15 years, and you don't get those single-day best moments because the results take so long to come in. You can work for years and years, and a school finally makes it to a transformational level. One of those days, I was in Heathrow Airport when the DC Public School scores were released; I only had my phone to look at all the data sheets from the scores, but I had to know school by school. I was taking copious notes, looking like a total crazy person with my nose in my phone. The news was so good, and I was so happy. That day is one of those markers.



Valerie Jarrett.

DARK DAYS

What was your worst moment on the job in Washington?

CM: One of my hardest days was at the end of the Clinton administration. The last day that I was in the White House, there was a lot of joy as President and Mrs. Clinton were running through the various rooms and dancing with the butlers. But then we had the seriousness of this ceremony, and it came time to say good-bye—good-bye to people I had spent 24–7 with, and just bidding them farewell was really difficult. The White House, as Valerie can attest to, is an extremely special place. The president’s house, the people’s house, is just a very unique and special place to work.

VJ: My worst day is easy: It was the day we went up to Newtown, Connecticut, after all those children were murdered. You couldn’t really take it in because it was just so unfathomable. I remember being in the Oval Office when the president heard how many children were killed, and he kept saying the number over and over, like, “Are you sure it’s that many children?” Two days later, we flew up to Connecticut, and because of weather we had to land and drive to the service. I got in the car with the president, and he was reading the speech that his team had prepared. He said, “This is not what I want to say.” So he got out a yellow piece of paper and for the next hour and 10 minutes he just wrote. He did not revise a word; he just wrote. I remember just trying to be very quiet because he only had an hour. How could you possibly know what to say to people who’ve just lost their children—and the families of teachers and administrators? He finished just as we pulled up. He gave it to a staffer and said, “Have this typed up as is; I don’t need to see it again.” For the next two hours we met with every family, the parents, the siblings, the grandparents, the faith leaders. The president was almost like a pastor because they collapsed in his arms. I think 24 of the 26

families were there. Then he gave one of the most perfect speeches he's ever given. I was sitting next to a dad; he grabbed my hand and was just sobbing uncontrollably. As a parent, I can't imagine anything worse than that. That was easily the worst day for me.

BFM: For me and for so many people, [the worst day] was 9/11. I was in Columbia Hospital for Women on bed rest, getting ready to have my daughter, trying to work on my laptop, and saw everything happen live on the Today show. Then I was hitting the phones, scrambling, while being stuck in a hospital bed worrying about my own family. It was just a stressful time to be in Washington and so sad, and to know you're getting ready to have a baby in that kind of atmosphere with all of this tragedy unfolding. I booked Dick Cheney from the hospital room. He gave that first interview after 9/11 with *Meet the Press* from Camp David on September 16, and then my daughter was born that afternoon.

GA: Yes, for me the worst day as a Washingtonian was September 11. I had gone to Cuba with a member of Congress, and we'd gotten back Sunday night. I had a little boy who was almost 3, and I just got back from this bucket-list trip; I was excited. I was on my way to a Chamber of Commerce breakfast and my mother called and told me to turn on the television. I turned it on in time to see the second plane going, and I really didn't know what to do. I thought, do I still go down to the meeting? Is it still going to go on? And then you hear these stories, these personal DC stories. **KB:** I agree. If you think of one truly horrific day here, it would have to be 9/11. I was the board chair at St. Patrick's Episcopal Day School and was in a meeting with the headmaster. His assistant came in and said, "I don't know if this is anything, but a plane just flew into the World Trade Center." We went out and turned on her television and looked at it, and the reports at first were [that it was a] small private plane, so we thought nothing of it. I went on to a parent coffee meeting and, with the television on, 50 moms watched the airplane go into the Pentagon. You knew at that moment that the city was changed forever.

Ambassador Capricia Penavic Marshall and Katherine Bradley.



GREATEST INFLUENCERS

VJ: Early in my career, a client of mine at the mayor's office—who was in charge of finance while I did all the

lawyering on the finance side—taught me how to ask for a promotion. I would've never done it without her. My view was that you work hard and people notice; the boss decides when it's time for you to be promoted. I had been doing restructuring of complicated deals. She said, "The work that you're doing is at the level of a deputy operation council... you should be the deputy." I thought that was ridiculous. Then she [was on] me every week, telling me what I should say. Finally—just because I couldn't see her one more time without doing it—I went into my boss's office and said, "I've been here now two years, and I've been doing all this work. My supervisor comes to me for advice. I believe that I would be more effective with the clients if I were a deputy." I will never forget how he looked at me and said, "Okay." It's not always that easy, but the lesson is this: If you're not advocating for yourself, you might sit around for a very long time waiting to be recognized.

CM: I have a wonderful mentor [in Hillary Clinton], who has allowed me to hitch my wagon to hers from the moment I went on to Bill Clinton's campaign. I will never forget when I was pregnant and hadn't told anyone yet, and I was the social secretary at the White House. I went over to Hillary and said, "I need to talk with you." She guessed that I was pregnant and said, "I have known this for several weeks, and I have been wondering when you we're going to tell me. Let's get the plan together because we're in this together. I'm going make this work for you." My Mexican mother was there from the moment Cole was born, and she said, "I need to go with you to the White House when you take this baby." So Hillary made it really easy for her to just be there with me. She gave my mom a little room up on the third floor where the baby would take naps in Chelsea's crib. It was just a very loving environment. She's been not only a mentor, but also a nurturer for me, my son, and my family—a real supporter, and I just adore her for that.

KB: The person that's been a real mentor to me is Terry Golden, who was the longtime chair of the Federal City Council and a stalwart member of the Washington business and education community. He began years ago taking me along to meetings with him, saying, "I want you to meet the politicians who are making the decisions. I want you to be on the Federal City Council with me"—and there weren't a lot of women on it then. Now he is chair of the KIPP DC board, so we interact all the time, and I'm very grateful he took me under his wing, especially after many years of feeling like I was alone.

BFM: Mine is easy because it's Tim Russert, who started at NBC at the same time as I did at *Meet the Press*. He took me under his wing and taught me so much about journalism, and inspired me to want to be in this field. He was constantly pushing me beyond my comfort zone—urging me to move up the ladder, to have more and more responsibility. As the Washington bureau chief and leader of *Meet the Press*, he was the boss of the bureau, so he made me the senior producer of the show when I was 27 and then executive producer when I was 31. Neither of those things was anything I thought I could do, and he was the one who pushed me. He was always the one who believed in being prepared; he never sat down at that moderator's chair without being thoroughly prepared. His focus was an inspiration to me.

GA: I've had a lot of people who have influenced me. I think about my French teacher at Ballou, who helped me to apply to college; she pushed me. When I had a junior fellowship at the US Naval Research Laboratory, there was this African American woman who was a scientist, and I had never seen an African American scientist before. She wanted me to enroll in the Toastmasters Club and compete against these college students, and I did—and won. Then my law school professor... I called her to ask what I should do about a job offer at FedEx, and she's the one who advised me to negotiate my salary before I stepped in there. These are people whom I consider mentors and who still guide me through decision making.

MIND THE GAP

At the State of the Union, President Obama referenced the gender pay gap that still exists—it's about 77 cents to the dollar. Why aren't we closing the gap with our male counterparts? How do we get

there?

VJ: It's inconceivable to me that at this point in the 21st century we still have that pay gap. The line in the president's State of the Union that really was off the charts was when he said, "When women succeed, America succeeds." Now two-thirds of all families are either headed by a woman as the breadwinner or they have two breadwinners, so the woman's contribution to the family income is more important than ever. Half of college graduates are women, more than half of those who graduate from graduate schools are women, so there's a great pipeline coming up in terms of education, but that doesn't mean [these women] won't hit a pay ceiling until the mind-set changes.

BFM: Maria Shriver recently did a report for NBC on women and pay equity. I was at home watching it with my daughter. Maria highlighted a woman who had sued for not being paid [equal wages], and my daughter could not believe that that was going on. It was inconceivable to her, and I had to explain to her that, yes, this was the case, and, yes, that many women had to fight for rights. She had no sense of this.

WORK/LIFE BALANCE

KB: I've adored being a mother. David and I both have attitudes that there's no boundary between work and personal lives. We love our jobs, and neither of us has a job that ends at 6 pm, so we try to include our sons [ages 24, 21, and 18] as much as possible. Our work requires a fair amount of entertaining, so we've moved almost all of it to our house; we've done that for years. We've been there at our kitchen table at a dinner and the boys would come in with questions about their homework.

VJ: I go to the White House gym every morning at 5:15 am; I'm a morning person. You have to know your body, what's going to make you feel fulfilled. I try to eat healthy and laugh an awful lot. I'm surrounded by incredible family and friends. You're not going to get a good friend unless you are a good friend. One of my best models is the first lady... Goodness knows, she's got a lot on her plate, but there isn't a time in the 22 years that I've known her that, in mid-conversation, she hasn't said, "How are you?" Let's face it, the first lady of the United States can get away with never asking how anyone else is. She's a really good friend. I've read articles where she's said the same thing about you, Valerie.

VJ: We laugh. We laugh an awful lot... And what a treat to spend the afternoon with all of you.



Ambassador Capricia Penavic Marshall

Ambassador-in-residence at the Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center at the Atlantic Council in Washington, Marshall recently launched Global Engagement Strategies, which advises international public and domestic clients on ways to use cultural diplomacy as a business and foreign policy tool.



Valerie B. Jarrett

A senior advisor to President Barack Obama, Jarrett also oversees the offices of Public Engagement, Intergovernmental Affairs, and, with the director of the Domestic Policy Council, oversees the office of Urban Affairs, Justice, and Opportunity. She chairs the White House Council on Women and Girls.



Betsy Fischer Martin

The senior executive producer and managing editor of NBC News Political Programming, Fischer Martin has been with NBC for 22 years, previously at the helm of the number-one rated Sunday morning public affairs program and the longest running television program in the world, *Meet the Press*, for more than a decade.



Gina Adams

As senior vice president for government affairs at FedEx Corporation, Adams is responsible for shaping the interests of all FedEx operating companies, including FedEx Express, FedEx Ground, and FedEx Services, in the political arenas. She serves on the boards of American University, Fight For Children, and the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, among other organizations.



Katherine Bradley

Bradley serves as president of the CityBridge Foundation, which she cofounded with her husband, David Bradley, owner of Atlantic Media and publisher of *The Atlantic* and *National Journal*. She's currently a board member for KIPP Foundation and STAND for Children, and chairs the Washington regional board for Teach for America.