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Javette C. Orgain, MD MPH
Presidential Inauguration Speech
Illinois Academy of Family Physicians
November 18, 2008

Good evening. Welcome!

I am so very happy that you have taken the time to be here tonite. For those of you who do not know this about me, I am quite passionate about things close to my heart. I do cry easily. So, I am going to try hard to get through this evening without too many tears.

You are my family, by blood, ancestral and extended; you are my valued friends, colleagues, co-workers, staff, mentees. I am so grateful and give the praise to my mother, Elizabeth Orgain, who was a single parent for me and my older sisters Andrea Bin-Walee and Diane Knowles.



For those of you who have traveled from down state and from out of state, I am truly honored. I won't be able to name you all individually, so I apologize in advance. Each of you has a piece of my story. I won't try to tell the whole story. But, let me bring a little bit of the Javette puzzle together for you.

In my early childhood and currently, I live on the south side of Chicago. I have lived in the projects-Chicago Housing Authority: Dearborn Homes. I began 1st grade at St. James skipping kindergarten and then went on to St. Dominic Catholic grammar school.

However, I was born at Cook County Hospital and have spent much of my life living and working on the West Side of Chicago: living in South Lawndale and K-town, continuing school at St. Agatha and Presentation Catholic grammar schools, St. Mary Catholic High school, and University of Illinois at Chicago for everything else: my Bachelor of Science degree in Mathematics, my Medical degree, and my Public Health degree in Epidemiology and Biostatistics.

I began my journey to medical school, not as an early childhood dream. If my mother had had her way, I might be working for Microsoft or Google. She exposed me to the world of computers and was ahead of the curve in that field. But as the typical rebellious youth, I did not listen. In high school, I wanted to be a stewardess/flight attendant but I was too tall and did not pass the brown bag test.

How did I get here?

Well, I came to my last quarter in school and needed a few more credits to graduate. I took a college course in kinesiology and became fascinated by the human body. I was converted by that course in kinesiology, coupled with my exposure to the health disparities including food deserts that exist in the black community while I was involved in community organizing in the ABLA homes on Racine and Roosevelt on the near West Side of Chicago. We ran a food co-op for the ABLA-CHA residents because there was no major grocery store, hence a food desert. I wrote the health articles for a community newspaper we published and tutored math at the local YMCA on Racine and Taylor (all demolished for the sake of neighborhood gentrification). The language-health care disparities and food deserts-was not yet in vogue then.

On the path, I had to continue course work at UIC after graduation in 1972 in preparation for applying to medical school and taking the Medical College Admission Test. As a child of a single parent, my education was financed by blood, sweat and tears like so many of you, my colleagues: through work, bank loans, an Illinois General Assembly scholarship from Representative Barbara Flynn Currie, and as one of the first students to receive the Illinois version of the National Health Service Corp Scholarship. This is a loan repayment program that requires a commitment to serve in an underserved/physician shortage area in the state of Illinois. Unfortunately, there are many areas right here in Chicago as well as throughout the state that qualified as underserved then and still do in 2008.

I entered UIC College of Medicine through the Medical Opportunities Program/MOP affectionately known as the Minority Opportunity Program and graduated via the Urban Health Program (UHP), the program for which I now serve as assistant dean and that celebrated 30 years this August. The essential mission of both programs was and remains similar: to develop a pipeline of students interested in medical school and to recruit, support, graduate, and return these students - Latino, Native American, and African-American - to the underserved communities from whence they come.

As a medical student in the UHP, there was a well developed student-to-student peer support network that included Student National Medical Association and there was a mentor program from physician members of the National Medical Association. So, it was at this level that I began an early foray into organized medicine. I went on to serve as an officer of the local society of the National Medical Association, the Cook County Physicians Association. I then became the 100th president of the NMA in 2000.

After graduation from medical school, I completed my residency training in family medicine at St. Joseph's Hospital in Chicago on north Lake Shore Drive. We were fortunate that the chair of the department felt it important that all residents be members of the American Academy of

Family Physicians (AAFP). So, the department paid our membership dues and thus began my relationship with the AAFP and the state society, the Illinois Academy of Family Physicians (IAFP) in 1982.

I am thankful for the many other opportunities and the many shoulders I have stood on along the way.

What I have described is just a bird's eye view of the blessings I have received.

It includes being an officer in IAFP.

Who are we? What is the IAFP?

The Illinois Academy of Family Physicians is the organization representing family medicine in our state. Last year, IAFP had a big 60th birthday celebration during the annual meeting of the AAFP.

Family Physicians care for families (children, youth, and adults) in our offices, in community health centers, in hospitals, in nursing homes, and in patient homes.

We volunteer in the inner-city free clinics, rural health centers and in medical missions around the world. Family physicians know our patients and we know what must be done to make this nation healthier again.

We are always educating ourselves to become better physicians, to practice smarter, and to help our patients take better care of themselves.

We are reinventing the family medicine practice, through the patient-centered medical home, while remaining true to our mission to care for families... the entire person... from cradle to grave.

We are collaborative leaders making the changes Illinois needs! For example:

Family physician Dr. Rick Leary is helping primary care physicians to better care for our most complex patients through the Your Healthcare Plus disease management program. If you are a physician and haven't already, please take advantage of the CME modules on the education section of the IAFP web site - www.iafp.com

Family Physician Dr. Martin Lipsky is Regional Dean of the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Rockford. Through their Rural Medicine education program and rural Family Medicine Residency track in Dixon, UICCOM at Rockford is feeding that pipeline of family physicians to the underserved rural areas of our state that need family medicine more than ever.

Family Physician Dr. Carrie Nelson is chair of the Chicago Patient Safety Forum, leading the entire medical community's shared goal of creating a safer healthcare system and reducing medical errors.

Family physician Dr. Carolyn Lopez is chair of the Institute of Medicine of Chicago and a

respected voice in the ongoing mission to improve Chicago and Cook County's commitment to the underserved through health system change. Dr. Lopez is the first woman physician of IAFP.

Family Physician Dr. Margaret Kirkegaard is medical director of Illinois Health Connect. Family physicians across the state are working with her to transform the Illinois Medicaid program into a true health care delivery system and a model for the nation.

We are not just talking about the patient-centered medical home, we're building them!

We have family physicians in every part of the state who are constant advocates for our mission and are engaged with their elected officials.

In 2002, IAFP started our Spring into Action tradition. At that time, the Academy dedicated one meeting in Springfield each year during the Illinois General Assembly session to focus on our legislative agenda and engage our state lawmakers. We had face to face conversations with lawmakers and we shared our stories. We have returned to Springfield every year since.

At that first Spring into Action meeting in March of 2002, we welcomed a young, enthusiastic Senator as our keynote speaker, our newly elected president - Barack Hussein Obama. After that meeting, then Senator Obama became a trusted ally in the General Assembly. And we have been welcomed by his office on our legislative visits to Capitol Hill in D.C.

In 2001, when my good friend Dr. Warren Jones was installed as the first African American president of our national organization, the American Academy of Family Physicians, it was a moment to treasure. The love shown by his colleagues, family and friends was truly inspiring.

But, Warren you cannot top this.

What an amazing feeling for me to stand here tonight – knowing that history is being made again!

IAFP has had a history and working relationship with the next president of the United States. A president who shares our commitment to health care reform and how to achieve it.



The biggest first of this decade. No, the biggest first of this century. And at this moment in history, I am absolutely overjoyed to also be a historical 2008 first - the first person of African descent to be the president of the Illinois Academy of Family Physicians.

One more first that you all should know:

On July 10th this year, the American Medical Association apologized for its past history of racial inequality toward African-American physicians; discriminatory treatment that influenced the birth of the NMA and was a major causative factor in the past and current level of health care disparities for persons of color.

Where do We go from here?

Not I alone as president. IAFP is so much more than a newly elected president and a board of directors. We are a community of leaders, educators, advocates and experts in the health of the people we serve.

In the spirit of these last 21 months, let me share a quote with you:

"I know that what I am asking for is impossible. But in our time, as in every time, the impossible is the least that one can demand – and one is, after all, emboldened by the spectacle of human history in general, and American Negro history in particular, for it testifies to nothing less than the perpetual achievement of the impossible. "

James Baldwin, **The Fire Next Time**

In my world as a daughter, sister, mother, friend, companion, mentor, administrator, and Family Physician, there are daily challenges. You are surely aware of the issues that face our families and communities: a failing economy, under-funded public education, health illiteracy, 47⁺ million persons uninsured or underinsured, diabetes, obesity, HTN, HIV/AIDS, cancer, violence, war, **man's inhumanity to man**. That is all I will say on these matters tonite. After all, this is a celebration.

But, in keeping with the mission and strategic initiatives of the Academy, seasoned by my passion for service, advocacy, and mentoring,

We must Embrace Change!

I pledge that with your help, we will:

1. Educate family physicians and the public about the patient-centered medical home.
2. (we will) Continue to advocate for access to quality, affordable health care for all. Using that same template that we crafted with then Senator Obama and a broader coalition thru the Campaign for Better Health Care, we will advocate for changes to bring quality primary care to all Illinoisans; services that include end-of-life care.
3. (we will) Focus on patient education and promoting primary prevention of those illnesses that are devastating our communities and that are impacted by lifestyle choices.
4. (we will) Prepare and support the next generation of family physicians, the future of family medicine, while addressing the needs of family physicians currently in practice.

How do we accomplish our goals? We Embrace the Change Illinois needs!

".....for it testifies to nothing less than the perpetual achievement of the impossible."

Join with me: Yes We Can! Yes We Can! Yes We Can! Thank you!

My heartfelt thanks to my family and friends for sharing this moment with me. My deepest gratitude to the leadership of IAFP for the confidence you have shown by electing me as president and the staff for making our work as volunteer leaders so very, very easy. I appreciate that you have embraced me and supported my aspirations. You function with integrity, discipline, and compassion. It is a pleasure to be in your company.

I Dream a World

by Langston Hughes

I dream a world where man
No other will scorn
Where love will bless the earth
And peace its paths adorn.
I dream a world where all
Will know sweet freedom's way,
Where greed no longer saps the soul
Nor avarice blights our day.
A world I dream where black or white,
Whatever race you be,
Will share the bounties of the earth
And every man is free,
Where wretchedness will hang its head
And joy, like a pearl,
Attend the needs of all mankind.
Of such I dream –
Our world!

Brian Lanker

I Dream A World

Portraits of Black Women Who Changed America

