

THE ECONOMIC CLUB

O F W A S H I N G T O N, D. C.

Signature Event

Allison Barber, Ph.D.

Speaker

**Allison Barber, Ph.D.
President and COO
Indiana Fever**

Interviewer

**Lawrence Di Rita
President, Greater Washington, D.C.
Bank of America**

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LAWRENCE DI RITA: First of all, congratulations on the Fever and the great season you guys have had.

ALLISON BARBER: Thanks. So, it's great to be back. We lived here for 20 years. Larry and I go way back to our Pentagon days.

MR. DI RITA: Yeah.

MS. BARBER: But it is a(n) exciting moment, and we're going to turn it into a movement.

MR. DI RITA: Yeah. Well, it feels like that's happening, right? I mean, it just feels – we were talking at our table about just how women's sports has just taken off.

MS. BARBER: Yeah. It's – I think we were talking about – I'm so glad to be here. Yesterday I was in Texas, speaking at the Sports Business Journal. And I've been in this job for six seasons. Five of them – four of them have been really awful. [Laughter.] And I used to have to try to manufacture invitations to try to share the story about women in sports. Sheila, you feel the pain, right? Just, you know, we would hijack other people's events just to try to get a word in for women's sports. And now opportunities are coming, and we're excited. You know, it's time. Title IX's over 50 years old, and so it's taken a long time to get to this moment. But we embrace it. We've had to change our mentality and our scope, and our focus has been –

MR. DI RITA: I mentioned, so to – so we've got an early morning event here. You probably were here last night.

MS. BARBER: Right.

MR. DI RITA: I'm guessing if we did this thing three years ago the hotel you stayed at would be a different hotel than where you stayed last night.

MS. BARBER: If we did this three years ago, you wouldn't have invited me. [Laughter.]

MR. DI RITA: Yeah, no, that's a – that's a – OK, you've got me there.

MS. BARBER: I mean, I knew you – I knew you three years ago. [Laughs.]

MR. DI RITA: But probably there would have been a Motel 6 somewhere that you'd have driven in from –

MS. BARBER: [Laughs.] That's right.

MR. DI RITA: – as opposed to wherever – upstairs, maybe. I –

MS. BARBER: Yes. Well, we wouldn't have flown in on charter flights, first of all.

MR. DI RITA: OK, yeah. All of that.

MS. BARBER: And we would not be at the nicer hotels.

MR. DI RITA: Yeah.

MS. BARBER: Which our athletes deserve. And – but it's a business model.

MR. DI RITA: Yeah, for sure. [Applause.] Yeah.

So, we're going to – I would like to talk – so you mentioned the Pentagon. You and I first got to know each other when we worked together in the Pentagon. I saw a great story. When you were appointed president of the Fever, '19 –

MS. BARBER: Right.

MR. DI RITA: – 2019, there was a great story, and it said: “From Saddam Hussein's Palace to Basketball and” –

MS. BARBER: Right.

MR. DI RITA: Explain a little bit about sort of how you became the president of the Fever. And what's your – in the same piece, it talks about how you've had eight careers –

MS. BARBER: Yes.

MR. DI RITA: – which is a great way to think about it. Gina, when she announced – gave my background, it sounded like I can't hold a job down. [Laughter.] But you've made a career out of that.

MS. BARBER: Yes.

MR. DI RITA: So, tell us a little bit about sort of how – your journey. And I want to talk a little bit about the Pentagon stuff, but –

MS. BARBER: Sure. You know, I've had this great opportunity. Brought up in Indiana – northwest Indiana from parents who just believed that if you work hard good things happen. And so, I started off as a first-grade schoolteacher, and from there my – when I was practicing – I was teaching, my husband – a Notre Dame alum; I'm recruiting for Notre Dame –

MR. DI RITA: Notre Dame. [Laughter.] No Irish here, right.

MS. BARBER: And he – yes. So, he was a lawyer in northwest Indiana.

MR. DI RITA: Indiana, OK. Yeah.

MS. BARBER: And the first Gulf War broke out, and my husband came home from work and said, I really want to serve the country. So, we both quit our jobs and he joined the Army. He probably couldn't get into the Navy.

MR. DI RITA: Yeah, no, we have high standards.

MS. BARBER: Yeah, I'm sure. [Laughter.] And quotas, apparently. [Laughter.]

MR. DI RITA: Yeah, no, I was – they needed a kid from Detroit, so.

MS. BARBER: Yes. So, he joined the Army, and the – we didn't know anything about the military. And so, he went and he met with a recruiter, and they said, oh, we can ship you out on Saturday. He's like, I'm a practicing lawyer; I can't ship out. And so, somebody said, you – somebody followed my husband to the parking lot, a recruiter –

MR. DI RITA: Oh my God.

MS. BARBER: – and said, you should be in the JAG Corps. We didn't know about that either. So, he came home from the recruiting station with the pay scale, and I looked – we both looked at it and we're like, OK, you go serve the country, I will get a third job, and we'll try to make ends meet.

MR. DI RITA: Yeah.

MS. BARBER: Anyway, long story short, he got into the JAG, and they sent us – the people said, well, you and your wife think about where do you want to be stationed. Anywhere in the world, give us your top five locations. Oh, man, we were excited. We wrestled with that. There's Hawaii. There's Germany.

MR. DI RITA: And Paris. Is that –

MS. BARBER: Oh, my word. We couldn't believe – [laughter] – we're like, we love the Army. We're going to travel the world. So, we put in our five. After a lot of thought and strategy, we put in our five locations where we would love to be stationed. And we got sent to New Jersey. [Laughter.]

So, in New Jersey, I volunteered for – Linda's here – I volunteered for the Red Cross in New Jersey. I have been a Red Cross volunteer since I was 16. [Applause.]

MR. DI RITA: Yeah. Very nice.

MS. BARBER: And they asked me if I would move to D.C. and run a program. And that's how we ended up coming to D.C. and spent several years in the Red Cross with Elizabeth Dole as president doing some just really great, impactful work. And then was fortunate enough to get the call to come to the Pentagon and spent seven-and-a-half years in the Bush administration.

MR. DI RITA: Yeah, no, and you did a fantastic job. So, you're – as we've learned now over the many years and as I knew at the time, you're expert at sort of getting people to understand the depth of what's really happening quite apart from the noise around it. And it's sometimes sort of cast aside as branding, but it's so much more. And you created a real sense of what the military was doing after 9/11 and the importance of that. Maybe you can talk a little bit about how you thought about that. And that got to the Saddam Hussein, and maybe we can talk about that too.

MS. BARBER: Yeah. Sure. It's interesting, because when you said that I thought about one time you and I were meeting, and I was coming up with some ideas. And you said, Allison, the difference between what you and I do – you said, Allison, you do the important; we're doing the urgent. Like, the media is the urgent, but you're laying down the pathway for the important of the mission of the men and women in the military. And I think that was true.

After 9/11, you know, I was – the phones just kept ringing. It was a wonderful moment. And on 9/11, I was in a plane flying to Atlanta to meet with a(n) ad agency. The whole purpose of that meeting was to ask the ad agency to come up with a recruitment campaign because we needed to encourage more people to serve in the military. So, imagine, we're sitting in the ad agency building. When we got there, they told us about the attacks. The head of the ad agency came into the conference room and said, don't worry, I have – I made some phone calls; we're safe here. And I just remember, I mean, we're from the Pentagon; I kind of remember thinking, I don't know a lot but I'm pretty sure people in Washington aren't calling the ad agency to be like you're good. But he felt like we were good, so. [Laughter.] That's the pecking order. I didn't – I don't remember calling ad agencies. [Laughter.] No offense, Carrie, but I just don't think that that was happening that way. But anyway, we stayed there and rented a car and drove back the next night, got back to the Pentagon the next day.

But what was amazing to me was there was this inflection point in our country. It was a – it was a scary and sad and terrible moment that had this lining of beauty in that we didn't need a campaign to invite people to join the military because after 9/11 the lines were outside the door of recruiting centers. And it was just this moment of saying this – an inflection point like that changes human behavior. There's some of that still happening now in women's sports.

MR. DI RITA: Yeah.

MS. BARBER: Not as critical or dramatic, but still, inflection points matter.

But after 9/11, my phone kept ringing from corporation – corporate leaders, individuals saying: What can we do to support the men and women in the military? We want to do more. And as you might remember, all of the lawyers at the Pentagon – no offense – kept saying, you can't do anything. We're the government; we can't do anything. And that felt unfulfilling. And so, with the help of Susan Davis and her team at SDI we created a campaign called America Supports You, and we just became this conduit of saying – all I knew was it was wrong to say no to the goodwill of humans and Americans. And I thought if we got this right – every day I thought about one thing: Could we prevent Vietnam? Every day I got up and just thought, what would it take to prevent that sentiment?

MR. DI RITA: Vietnam meaning the reaction of the public to turn against the military in some way because of what was going on. Yeah.

MS. BARBER: Yes, that's right. That's right, the attitude and – so there were different opinions about the war.

MR. DI RITA: Right.

MS. BARBER: But how about if we find a way to give Americans a way to still support the military and their families?

And so, America Supports You became this overarching campaign of really laying that groundwork to say let's connect some dots for people. The lawyers still hated it. You know, we paid the price for that. But it was –

MR. DI RITA: No, but it was – I'm going to try and work the technology here a second. So that's – that is America Supports You, so you remember. So, talk about – so we – this was Washington, D.C. These were on Labor Day Weekend, I think, in '04, '05, '06, these parades. Talk about that a little bit.

MS. BARBER: Yeah, the Freedom Walk. So, it was –

MR. DI RITA: It was Freedom Walk, yeah.

MS. BARBER: We were trying to raise visibility for the 9/11 memorial, which is beautiful. If you haven't gone, I invite you to go. It's really beautiful, at the Pentagon.

We were trying to raise visibility. And somebody said, well, Allison, can you come up with some idea? Somebody that worked for us said there used to be Volksmarches in D.C. – or, in Germany, and could we do that? And so, we got together, and I went over, and we talked to Susan and her team. It's like, what if we put together a walk that just invited people to come out and say we support men and women in the military, first responders? And we called the Freedom Walks. And the challenge was by the time the idea came together we had 56 days to do it, and we had to get through three different governments because Virginia, D.C., the Pentagon. And I remember when we were walking down the street I said to Susan: Maybe there's – do you ever think it's just too hard? We briefed the mayor's office, and they had a million reasons why we couldn't do it. I said: Do you ever think this is too hard? And Susan's like, no. And I'm like, all right, then we're doing it.

MR. DI RITA: Yeah. [Laughter.]

MS. BARBER: And thousands of people showed up for Freedom Walk the first year, and then we did them in all 50 states and several countries around the world, because it was just a way to bring people together to say we're not going to forget.

And you know, Secretary Rumsfeld was into it. And we did – the one year we did the lights – the beams of lights. And I learned from you and Secretary Rumsfeld at that time, like, don't look at a problem in the smallest ways; look at a problem in the biggest way, because then you'll bring more creativity and energy to the solution. If you're only trying to find one myopic thing, everybody will tell you why you can't solve that. You blow it up, make it bigger, and people will come along and help you. And that's what we did with the Freedom Walk.

MR. DI RITA: Yeah, it was remarkable. It was – it really was. And it really did create a sense that, OK, this is going to be different. We may or may not like what's going on in Iraq and Afghanistan, but we are going to stick by the military.

MS. BARBER: That's right, yeah.

MR. DI RITA: And it really – it really did create that.

MS. BARBER: Cabinet secretaries walked.

MR. DI RITA: Yeah.

MS. BARBER: I mean, it was really quite amazing and powerful.

MR. DI RITA: Yeah. And you spent a little time in Iraq, just to mention that.

And you were saying you just saw Condi Rice in Indianapolis.

MS. BARBER: We just hosted Condi at our Economic Club, and it was wonderful. And I took her to the Fever practice because one of my players, Lexie Hull, has her bachelor's and master's in engineering from Stanford.

MR. DI RITA: Typical of a pro basketball player, yeah.

MS. BARBER: Exactly, yeah. All the time. [Laughter.] We actually – all of our players have their bachelor's degrees, which is pretty amazing. [Applause.]

But you're – actually, I have Larry to thank for my first trip to Iraq. We were in the Situation Room and Dr. Rice – this is off the record, yes? Yeah.

MR. DI RITA: Yeah, no, yeah. This is, like, they don't go nowhere.

MS. BARBER: OK, good. Kind of like our careers. [Laughter.]

MR. DI RITA: For a period, that was kind of true. Go ahead.

MS. BARBER: So, we're in the Situation Room. And Dr. Rice wanted a press center set up in Iraq. You remember this? And she said, how long is it going to take? Because we were three news cycles behind every day. And so, she said, we need a press center in Iraq. And she didn't

really get energized – exercised, but she was determined. And she kind of hit that table in the Situation Room. And she’s, like, what’s it going to take to get that press center set up? And my favorite friend sitting to my left said, well, when I want something like that done, I give it to Allison. And I remember looking at you – [laughter] – like, I do not want to go to Iraq. I am not that person. A lot of people wanted to check their box, like, put the stamp.

MR. DI RITA: Go to Iraq.

MS. BARBER: Like, I went to Iraq. I was in Afghanistan. I’m, like, I’m a first-grade schoolteacher. I’m fine in here.

MR. DI RITA: From New Jersey. [Laughter.]

MS. BARBER: So that got me my first trip to Iraq. And there – and Larry, you know, is, like, don’t worry, we’ll send a team with you. And now, God bless my husband. He actually volunteered to deploy to Iraq. So, he was doing God’s work in Iraq, like, with the troops, the whole thing. And I’m flying in in these protected bubbles. And, oh, we’ll send people with you. And I say, OK, great. I get to the airport, and I get a call from the people saying, oh no, they got detailed to the president to take him to NASCAR. And now I’m going to Iraq by myself. [Laughter.] So, I get into Baghdad after a corkscrew landing into Iraq.

MR. DI RITA: Yeah. Those are always exciting.

MS. BARBER: Always fun. I get into Baghdad. There’s no one there. There’s a bus that says, “green zone,” which is where my office is going to be, at Saddam’s Palace. I get on the bus. I get to the green zone. I go walking in. And there’s a colonel there. And I went over to him. I said: Hi. I’m Allison Barber from the Pentagon. He said, ma’am, how did you get here? I said, well, I took the bus. [Laughter.]

MR. DI RITA: The green zone express.

MS. BARBER: Yeah. And he said to me, and I quote, “The suicide bus?” [Laughter.] I said, well, I can be certain that if it had said that instead of “green zone” – [laughter] – even I wouldn’t have taken that.

MR. DI RITA: I would have waited for the next one.

MS. BARBER: I would have – sure. Like just serious injury bus, that would – I would take that one. [Laughter.]

MR. DI RITA: Well, obviously, that terrific sort of experience and all of that – thank you – yeah, you’re welcome. [Laughter.] But you did have basketball in your blood even while that was all going on. And I do want to kind of just start with this one. Mia, if you could run this, and you can just explain what this is. I think that’s little Allison Barber.

MS. BARBER: Oh my gosh.

MR. DI RITA: Is that going to run? Can you run that, Mia? I don't know if it'll play.

[Music plays.]

MS. BARBER: Oh, this is me getting my first basketball in my life.

MR. DI RITA: Yeah, look at that. [Laughter.]

[Music ends.]

That's fantastic. Yay, that's pretty good. [Applause.] So, while you're at – that's very good. You almost got it going there.

MS. BARBER: And I taught Caitlin everything she knows. [Laughter.]

MR. DI RITA: Yeah. So, while you're doing all the things in the Pentagon and everything, obviously basketball – tell us a little about your own basketball sort of journey.

MS. BARBER: Well, if you're from Indiana then basketball is your game. And so, my parents bought me my first basketball and hoop as a young child. And I played in my driveway. My dad used to always say to me, take it to the hoop, kid. This is just his voice in my head, meaning get closer to the basket and you might actually make it. What I – but what he really gave me was a philosophy for my life of taking it to the hoop, means you have a goal, you have drive, you're willing to take risk. You know, the closer you are to the basket, if you missed that shot – all of you would boo me, you would. If I miss a three pointer, you'd be, like, I can't make it either. But you're willing to take this risk, to get fouled.

And you also learn how to play on a team. So, if you're in basketball and you're driving to the hoop, and you're going to be defended, you're looking for somebody else to pass the ball to. And so, it really taught me, this just take it to the hoop mantra has really played out through all my careers.

MR. DI RITA: Yeah.

MS. BARBER: Yeah.

MR. DI RITA: So, but – so basket – and it's true. And if you're in Indiana –

MS. BARBER: It's what we do.

MR. DI RITA: Mr. Basketball, Miss Basketball. I mean, it's a big deal, no question about it.

MS. BARBER: It is, yeah.

MR. DI RITA: But you, obviously, went back to Indiana after the Pentagon, after your time in Washington, and did what, before you got into the –

MS. BARBER: Yeah, it's interesting. I crossed paths a lot with Mitch Daniels. And he was the governor at the time. And any time I would go home to see my family, Mitch would always say, don't forget to come home. Like, you got to come home at some point. You can't stay in D.C. Come home and help us out. So, one morning I decided, my husband and I decided, it was time to move home to be with family. We'd been here 20 years. We went and met with Governor Daniels. And he said, I want to start this university. It's WGU, Western Governors University. It's our country's online university. And I want to start it for Indiana and make it our own online university. And would you be the chancellor?

And so, I didn't know much about the actual position, but I knew that education mattered. As a teacher and benefitted from my education, I thought what if I put my hand to helping adults find a next path for benefitted themselves through education? So, I started WGU Indiana. And it was – you know, we had 200 students. And it was a startup mentality of building a new brand and meaning and connection. Our goal – my goal, was to get students in all 92 counties of Indiana. Our state researcher met with me. And she's, like, Allison, you got to tone down that goal. I've heard that before. [Laughter.]

MR. DI RITA: Take it to the hoop, right?

MS. BARBER: I know, right? She's, like, Ohio County is one of the smallest counties in the country. You'll never get a student there. Every month I would get my map. And finally, Ohio County had a student. So, I got my team together. And I said, what else is missing? They said, Newton County. So, I cold-called Newton County. Some woman answered. I said, I'm calling on behalf of the chancellor of WGU. I didn't tell her I was the chancellor. I felt like that was kind of awkward. [Laughter.]

MR. DI RITA: We can't get her on the phone. I'm on behalf of the chancellor.

MS. BARBER: Yeah, but she's a really good staffer. [Laughter.] Like, could we come up and talk to you about our university? And she said, well, our chamber meets on Thursdays. Could she come Thursday? And I said, when? She said, the day after tomorrow. I said, oh yeah, I'm sure she'll be there. So, I got my car. I drove to Newton County. [Laughter.] I spoke to all 12 people at the chamber. Some woman at the end said, well, can I enroll? And I couldn't believe it. It's like, we did it. Newton County was the last county. So, I'm trying to be calm and cool. And I said, well, if you think it's the right fit for you, if you think. [Laughter.] And then I went in the bathroom, and I was, like, giving myself the Oprah speech. Like, you had a goal. You took it to the hoop.

MR. DI RITA: You got this, girl.

MS. BARBER: You got this, girl. Yeah. And then I came out and my executive was with me. She goes, I have bad news. She actually lives in Illinois, so it doesn't count. She works in Newton County. [Laughter.] But she loved it so much, and told her friends, we got a student.

And I only remember it was Newton County because then I bought Fig Newtons for everybody on my staff to celebrate.

MR. DI RITA: Good branding.

MS. BARBER: We got it. Ninety-two counties, yeah. So, I did that for six years.

MR. DI RITA: So, distance learning, basically?

MS. BARBER: It is. Online education.

MR. DI RITA: And where – and so then it went – so 92 counties in Indiana.

MS. BARBER: Seventeen thousand graduates, yeah. All – and all stay in the state. You know, bachelor's and master's degrees. And had a lot of meaning, yeah.

MR. DI RITA: Well done. And so – and then – and so how long did you do that?

MS. BARBER: I did that for about six and a half, then started the foundation. So, I was there eight years. And then on a Friday morning I got a phone call. And my caller ID showed me that it was the CEO of Pacers Sports and Entertainment. And when I saw it – and I knew him. I was friends with his wife. I knew Rick. But when I saw it was his number on a Friday morning, I thought, uh-oh, he does not have enough people at his table at the Economic Club lunch. [Laughter.] And, you know, he's got too many interns and the client. And I looked immediately, and I was in a suit and I thought, oh, great, I can go sit at his table. It's fine.

I answered the phone. And he said, Allison, how about coming to talk to me about being the president of the Fever? And I laughed out loud. I mean, I just never saw it coming. And I was a fan of the game. I been to the games. But it just wasn't really in my pathway. And I said, oh, Rick, this is a terrible time. I'm starting a new initiative at the university. I could never do it. Oh, just come talk to me. And I said, I'll talk to you. I love what you're doing for women and the city and state, but I just want you to know that timing is not right, Rick. And I just don't think it will work. He goes, OK. Come talk to me.

I hang up. I call my husband. I'm like, you are not going to believe in the call I just got. Rick asked me about being the president of the Fever. My husband said, what do you think? I said, oh, I'm doing it. [Laughter.]

MR. DI RITA: This a perfect time.

MS. BARBER: I just needed to negotiate my deal; you know? It's, like, I didn't want him to know I was doing it. [Laughter.]

MR. DI RITA: So, this is 2018-19?

MS. BARBER: Nineteen, yes.

MR. DI RITA: And when you became the president, what was the team's record the year you became the president? Do you remember?

MS. BARBER: They had won 13 games. Yeah, so it was a – it wasn't great. They hadn't made the playoffs since 2016. So really, the pitch to me was could you come, work as the president, rebuild the brand, try to keep the franchise relevant, while underneath the team starts rebuilding? So, I'd never been in sports. I did not actually understand how difficult that underneath piece was and how little influence I would have on that. I would have taken it anyway. It's been a great run. I mean, that's easy to say now, because it's a great run. There were some dark years.

MR. DI RITA: But what – so you when you took over – and, again, going back to some of the press I saw at the time, it said it's time for Fever 2.0. This is, like, at a time when they'd won 13 games, haven't been to the playoffs in three years. What were you thinking about at that point, other than I don't know what the hell this is but we're going to do 2.0 because it's going to be better than 1.0?

MS. BARBER: Well, I just felt like – I learned a lot when I went into the job. And at my press conference I said there too, oh, let's get fans in all 92 counties. We're the only female professional team in Indiana. And afterwards, somebody came up to me and said, well, you don't sell tickets in all 92 counties. And I said, well, not yet. You have to build awareness. And so, I jumped on the road. I put on our Freddy Fever mascot and went – and people didn't know I was the president. I just showed up in the mascot to try to build awareness for the brand. Because you can't sell a ticket if you don't have awareness.

So, we just started that model of let's build – let's start the conversation, build the momentum. And but people in sports – Sheila, you'll know this too – you know, they believe things. There's so much passion that sometimes overrides data. And so that's my first time in that type of a career, where direct – the data doesn't drive, passion sometimes drives. So, people will – you know, would say to me, well, Allison, you'll have fans. You know, people in the company are like, Allison, you're ahead of your time. You're ahead of your time. You'll have fans when you start winning. And I said, well, I just – I disagree with that.

I'm a Cubs fan. Like – [laughter] – I'm a Cubs fan because I believe in what the Cubs stand for, and the culture of that. And if we could create a culture, and give people something to believe in, we will build fandom. And we actually – even in losing seasons, our fans started increasing because we were giving them something to believe in. And so, you know, my third year we won six games. It was terrible. I mean, we went through four coaches, three general managers, all new players.

It was hard. We won six games my second season. And I am a devout optimist, with no apology. And I traveled the state. I said, good news. There's nowhere to go but up. We only won six games, but we're going to be better. There is no way to go but up. And the next season, we won five games. [Laughter.]

MR. DI RITA: Yeah. So, you – at that time, were you playing in Gainbridge? Was it the same – you're playing in an arena with 17,000 capacity?

MS. BARBER: Yes.

MR. DI RITA: And what was it –

MS. BARBER: And we would have between 2,000 and 3,000 fans. I mean, the – it was hard. And then – and we moved around to different locations during a rebuild. So, it was just – you feel the pain, right? I mean, and what's happening too is people were saying, oh, you should pay your players more. You should pay – your female athletes should make more money. And casually, and as respectfully as I could, I would say, well, have you bought a ticket? Because we're a business. And so, if we don't sell tickets, we don't have the money and revenue. And do you watch the games on television? And do you, I mean, it's a partnership with fans that you have to have to be able to have money to pay players more. And now we're starting to have that trajectory.

MR. DI RITA: Well, talk a little bit about that. So, you basically – you were there. And so, it's scarcity to abundance. Susan and I were talking about this very concept, and how you've managed – like, so now it's, obviously, very different. Mary, somebody, was saying that 100-level seat tonight is 400 bucks.

MS. BARBER: Mmm hmm, right.

MR. DI RITA: Probably wasn't the case when you were here – when the Fever came to play the Mystic a few years ago.

MS. BARBER: No. My family used to come – they'd come to all my games. And we used to sit on the floor. And I told my sister – and my cousins are here today, so they know that Lori [sp] would not love this. I said to my sister, oh, we're not sitting in the floor seats anymore. She said, because?

MR. DI RITA: What's the deal, yeah?

MS. BARBER: I said – she goes, how'd you give away my ticket? I said: Lori [sp], I've worked five years for somebody to want to buy that ticket. [Laughter.] You should be happy. And then I said, and you could buy it. And she goes, no, I'll sit wherever you're sitting. [Laughter.]

MR. DI RITA: So, but how – but that has an impact on salaries for the players? It has an impact, we already talked about the travel, and everything like that. How do you think about, now as the sort of chief operating officer, this is a very different environment. And how do you build for the future and make that last, sustain that?

MS. BARBER: Yeah. You know when Caitlin¹ decided, you know, whatever, April 19th, at 4:21, when she decided – 4:21 in the afternoon when she said she was going pro, everything changed for us. But we had already shifted our focus, because we had Aliyah Boston from South Carolina, our first pick the previous year. You do – if you don't spend a lot of time in sports, you have to be really bad to get two first pick rounds back-to-back.

MR. DI RITA: And the second round, the first – number two.

MS. BARBER: Yeah, yeah, thanks for reminding me of that too.

MR. DI RITA: So, you had a number two, a number one, a number one. Just want to –

MS. BARBER: Yeah. No, thank you for that.

MR. DI RITA: You're welcome.

MS. BARBER: Yes.

MR. DI RITA: I'm here for you. [Laughter.] Legacy of losing, to win.

MS. BARBER: Uh-huh, legacy of losing. Mmm hmm, that's right. So, you know, we started to see some momentum with Aaliyah. And also, the college game was getting more attention. And so, all of these things connect. But when Caitlin came out, I made two phone calls – one to a former governor and one to a tech CEO – because I said to our owner, Herb Simon, have you – you've got – you know, he's a billionaire with all these companies. I said, Herb, have you ever experienced a moment in a company where it changed like this overnight? And he said, no. So, I thought, well, if I'm going to strategize this, I better go talk to some people who could say yes to that.

And so, I met with a tech CEO. And I said, I feel like I've been writing code in my basement for five years and my IPO just hit. And so, he spent an hour with me thinking about how do you change your mindset to go in – and that is scarcity. He said, when we were starting our tech company, we saved paper clips like we were scrappy. And I thought, yes, I traveled the state in our mascot. Like, that's scrappy. And he said, and then I – you know, we sold for billions of dollars. And now how do you reshape that? So immediately you built out some new members of our team that didn't have the legacy of how it used to be.

You know, and so we needed to hire security, you know, folks to travel with us. We had to hire some additional trainers. And somebody said, well, now you're going to have to have a massage therapist travel with you. And I said, just one? Like, do we need three? Let's get three. Like this – but it's this mindset of saying – and so meeting with people outside of the sport industry was really instructive to say, this is how you reimagine your momentum. And the

¹ Caitlin Clark is a first-year professional basketball player for the Indiana Fever of the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA). She played college basketball for the Iowa Hawkeyes and is regarded as one of the greatest collegiate players of all time.

former governor said, Allison, slow down. You got to do first things first. Caitlin has to put a ball through the hoop before you can think about this but be ready.

And I just remember Secretary Rumsfeld. We'd be working on something, and his – you'd work so hard on a freedom walk or some big event, and you're getting ready to walk out of his office with him to that event, and you've put so much energy into it. And his last words to you before you step out on stage was, don't screw it up, right?

MR. DI RITA: Oh, yeah.

MS. BARBER: Whatever you do, don't screw it up. Like, thank you for the inspiration, sir.

MR. DI RITA: Yeah, thanks for that pep talk.

MS. BARBER: Not like, you got it, Allison. You worked so hard. We're sure this is going to be wonderful. Just, don't screw it up. So that first season with this momentum, my goal was to not screw it up. But I immediately wrote a strategy about how do you build on the momentum, because I think we owe that to the fans and the girls and the women and the future players to say, this is – we can't let this slip. You know, when the WNBA started, all the arenas were sold out. I mean, they had big crowds when it started, 28-[2]9 years ago. And then it slipped away, for a lot of reasons. So how do we maximize this moment, is really our goal.

MR. DI RITA: Yeah. But so – and you talked about that with the military, this inflection point. And you think that this is, for the sport, an inflection point?

MS. BARBER: I think it's an inflection point for girls and women's sports. So, what we're watching is that the attention is rising not just for basketball, although that is the driver for sure. But, you know, now we have a new women's volleyball – professional volleyball league, and the soccer, yes. So, we're watching it happen. But what's happening with basketball, it's unprecedented. If you'll be at the game tonight, it's breathtaking. We were at a game and a team in Atlanta has a private – their own facility arena. And they used their NBA arena when we came to town, because they could sell it out.

And since this is off the record, here's all you need to know about Caitlin Clark. When we would go to away games, they always sold out, unbelievable. So, Atlanta would normally have 3,000-4,000 people. Now they have 17,000 people. And they sold 1,000 standing room only tickets. So, when we walked into the arena, people were on that third balcony looking down at the tops of our players' heads to watch. It's really hard to take in. After a few away games and all of the sellouts, Caitlin asked the WNBA if they would pay spot bonuses to the away team players. She said, we're making all this new revenue, and I would like the away team to benefit from that. Could they get a spot bonus? So that's the heart of Caitlin Clark. I mean, that's a classy, amazing person. [Applause.]

MR. DI RITA: Yeah. So, but it's – yeah, absolutely.

MS. BARBER: The answer was no, by the way, because it's a collective bargaining agreement, and the players association couldn't do it.

MR. DI RITA: I was going to say, so did they do that? But it is a little bit like the Michael Jordan effect, right? So, in other words, this has changed – to some degree, changing the economics of the sport in a really remarkable way.

MS. BARBER: The people at Nike told me that the thing that Caitlin has done is also similar to what Tiger did, in that they brought new fans to the sport. So, Michael Jordan energized and became a role model for all the kids. Caitlin's got that. She's brought new fans to it. But she's even more than that, in that she's 22. So, she came right out of college and hit, you know, very successful. I mean, our start to our season was tough. I got emails all the time from people. You should fire your coach. You should fire your GM. You should – because we were on the road playing the best teams. It was really hard. And then one day, I got an email from a fan that said, you should be fired. [Laughter.]

MR. DI RITA: Who's going to do that?

MS. BARBER: No, I printed it. I printed it. I'm, like, oh my God. They think I'm relevant. Like, this is awesome. [Laughter.] It's in my folder at home. I have a humility folder. It's right in there. I'm like –

MR. DI RITA: Eternal optimist, I like it.

MS. BARBER: That's right. [Laughs.]

MR. DI RITA: But you talked about actually the season. So, there was some – a little bit of noise around the Olympics, and the team, and Caitlin. But did that really – maybe that helped, right? So, I mean, I think you guys are nine and four since the Olympics. I mean, did that make a difference?

MS. BARBER: I think it did. There were – you know, it's – the book "Tuesdays with Morrie" talks about the tension of opposites and how really that's a good thing. So, we did have this tension between the league and the American fans that wanted to see Caitlin at the Olympics, from the veterans who have been at the Olympics and the Olympic Committee that, you know, thought that the veterans should play. I'm glad they won the gold medal for lots of reasons. It's the longest running gold medal tenure track of any Olympic sport. Yeah, it's amazing. I'm glad they won because it took away the narrative, like, they should have taken Caitlin.

But it was good for Caitlin and my team, because Caitlin got a break. So, she came right out of college. So, the path for the WNBA is you come out of college, you finish your tournament, you're drafted in April, you're at training camp. So, you're out of college, training camp, you're on the road playing in May. So, there was no downtime. The Olympics was really a good time for her to rest, rebuild, and for our team to have some time together that wasn't on the road playing, you know, this aggressive schedule.

So, and, you know, if Caitlin is healthy in four years she'll be our Olympian, with a lot of other really wonderful players. And I think that's Caitlin, God love her, in the beginning of our season, sometimes we'd wish she would pass less and shoot more. She's an amazing passer, a wonderful shooter. But what she was building was team camaraderie of passing the ball, helping other people play a better game, and sometimes to the detriment of our own scores. And now we've figured that rhythm out.

MR. DI RITA: Yeah, there was a lot of sort of – and it's all – we all have had to deal with the press in one way, shape, or form. So, we take – we get that they want the story. But one of the storylines was this tension on the team and everything like that. And you do have – you know, you have a rookie of the year, you have two number one draft picks. It sounds like that's not – that's less – there's less there, there than –

MS. BARBER: That's right. It's good for the media to build all of that up. But my coach – I'm a big fan of our head coach, Christie Sides. She's really controlled the locker room. And that's what it comes to in sports, is who can control the locker room. And when I got this job, I wrote a strategy, my three Cs to build a championship culture – commit, compete, and contribute, will give us a championship culture. I didn't know if it would get us –

MR. DI RITA: Five Cs. Ultimately five Cs.

MS. BARBER: I know, but I didn't know about that part, last part.

MR. DI RITA: Oh, gotcha. That's the –

MS. BARBER: Sorry. You're good at math. [Laughter.]

MR. DI RITA: I was in the Navy.

MS. BARBER: I know. [Laughter.] So, I thought, if we can commit every day, all of us, to be the best person we could be. And in sports, it was interesting. The front office, all the people were, a little bit willing to accept a double standard. They wanted the players to perform at the highest level, but they didn't expect that of themselves. Like, well, we'll sell more tickets when they win. It's like, this is not the right culture. So, we had to change some folks. Commit to be the best person.

Compete for what? Goodwill, partners, sponsors, all of the things, wins. But we couldn't control that. And then contribute. How do we get back into the community? So, this framework seemed to make a lot of sense. So, we painted it on the locker room wall. When you walked in, there were these big words: Commit, compete and contribute. And as a corporate kind of, you know, what's your mission statement, or your values, or your vision statement, all the things, yeah. So, we walked in, and we saw it every day. And I thought it looked so great. And then I hired Lin Dunn, our general manager. And she came in first day, had those painted over. [Laughter.] I'm like, shocking.

I'm like – she, goes, listen, we still believe in those three C's, whatever they are, but we're putting pictures of players on this wall. It's a locker room. [Laughter.] And I was like, oh, this is – there were moments of that, where I thought I'm probably not the right fit in sports. Or my first week on the job, Pacers made it to the playoffs. And they passed out these shirts. They ordered 16,000 gold shirts. And it said: Gold Don't Quit. And I went to the marketing person. I'm like, I don't – I'm sorry to tell you. I know you ordered 16,000 shirts. But there's a typo on your shirt. I said, it's gold – you have two options. It's either gold doesn't quit or gold, comma, don't quit. And she looked at me, and she's like, why are you in sports? [Laughter.] I'm, like, I –

MR. DI RITA: You really don't get this thing, do you?

MS. BARBER: You know, you should go, well, it's not "gold, don't quit." I took my shirt home and took a Sharpie and put a comma. [Laughter.] I'm like, I am not wearing a shirt that says, "gold don't quit." Like –

MR. DI RITA: That's your teacher coming out.

MS. BARBER: It is. Yeah, yeah. It hasn't all been smooth. [Laughs.]

MR. DI RITA: How about NIL?² So as a team sort of front office, what do you think about that? And is it changing the sport? And how? And is it good?

MR. DI RITA: Yeah. I'm a big fan of NIL. It's complicated, like every good new thing is. So much of that was happening anyway without really protecting the players and their opportunity. But my favorite part, Larry, is the women who are coming out with these NIL deals, and they are significant, and they're deserved – they deserve them. They're coming out now of college as businesswomen. So, some of our rookies – not just Caitlin. The rookies go to the league. They get drafted. The league puts contracts in front of them. You've probably heard this story, Sheila. The Players Association gives them a contract to sign. And they said, well, you have to sign this contract. And the players said, well, OK, we'll have our lawyers look at it.

And the Players Association was like, no, you have to sign this if you want to play in the W. And these college graduates said, well, we'll sign it, but we need our lawyer to look at it. The league wasn't that happy about it. I loved it because through the NIL these women are learning to be entrepreneurs and protect their own image and their right and negotiate for what they need. And so, I think it's terrific. And the college NIL deals now typically convert, and they come with the player to become a sponsorship deal of the player. And so, they're – continue making that income.

MR. DI RITA: And do you see in Indiana – have you had a chance to see how that's going? In other words, do you see the business community stepping up.

² Name, image and likeness (NIL) are the three elements that make up "right of publicity," a legal concept used to prevent or allow the use of an individual to promote a product or service.

MS. BARBER: We do. Yeah, we do. And we're very fortunate. I mean, I just kind of accept the Caitlin moment with a lot of humility, because it's just, you know, you have to lose a lot to be here, and then you just have to be, you know, in the right place at the right time. So, it's – we hold it very, you know, gently, that we're fortunate to have this moment. But what happened is we've spent five years calling companies trying to get them to be a partner. And that inflection moment happens, and people are calling us, saying, how can we get on your jersey patch? And so, it's – you know, I've had the five years of that not being the case.

You know, my sponsorship people would sell a Fever deal for \$5,000. And I said to them, I don't even get out of bed for \$5,000. [Laughter.] Like, what are we doing here? Like, don't devalue the product. And they said, yeah, but people don't want to support it. I said, because you're teaching them they don't have to. And so, we had some growth to do that got us ready for this moment. But, you know, that's – you know, Caitlin makes me look smarter, more strategic, all the things like all of a sudden.

MR. DI RITA: And even – and she even makes it – is that still, can we still do this? I just want to – I don't know if that's still on. Because I got a picture of Allison taking a great shot, because I think Caitlin actually made you a better shooter, too.

MS. BARBER: Did she?

MR. DI RITA: Yeah, we got a great picture of you taking a shot.

MS. BARBER: No, I don't even know what that is. Oh, yeah. [Laughs.]

MR. DI RITA: You have actually great form there.

MS. BARBER: Yeah, thank you. You know, that's both my worlds colliding. Twenty years in D.C. and basketball.

MR. DI RITA: That what I'm saying. That's the White House. That's everything.

MS. BARBER: That's right.

MR. DI RITA: What is that? Do you remember?

MS. BARBER: I do remember. It's the Easter egg – it's a(n) Easter Egg Roll. And they wanted to highlight all of sports. And they didn't have anybody that could make it from women's basketball. And I got a call from the First Lady's Office, from a woman, Colby [sp], who works there. There she goes, you might not remember me, but I was an intern at the Indiana Motor Speedway years ago, and you were nice enough to take me to coffee to help me think about my career.

MR. DI RITA: Oh, my God.

MS. BARBER: She said, we need somebody from basketball. And I happened to have a player because it was April, so we were in training season. I had a player who was on injure reserve, so she and I jumped on a plane, and we came and shot hoops for the –

MR. DI RITA: That's a great shot, though.

MS. BARBER: Yeah, thanks. That's – you know, I didn't get signed after that. [Laughter.]

MR. DI RITA: I know they probably – well, they probably saw you spinning the ball and said, that's our girl. So, we're going to get to your questions. So please, do have questions if you want. I do want to ask you. So, it's been announced that you've got another – your ninth career, maybe, I don't know. But tell us a little bit about your next journey.

MS. BARBER: Thank you. Yeah. Three weeks ago, a group of folks who've been working for three years to create a brand new project came to me and asked me – shared with me the vision of this project. And it seems like it's worth doing. So, at the end of our season, which I hope is deep into the playoffs, I will transition to create the country's first girl's sport and leadership complex. And never been done. It will be all the sports. It'll be focused just on girls, 12th grade and under, to help them develop. It will have a health and wellness center, training facilities, soccer, football – flag football, basketball, volleyball, golf. Billie Jean King is involved in this as well. So, this really is – at 4:00 today the press announce will go out. So, it's really brand new.

But we just feel like – it's a little bit to the – you know, I was writing the strategy, how do you build a momentum? I didn't know about this opportunity, but this is exactly what I was thinking about, is how do we take the spirit and the energy of the Caitlin Clarks and the players across the WNBA who say we want to provide more for girls? And what do we know about – I look at research. You know, it's a little bit of my education background. Probably 5 million kids in America are dealing with depression. Now, many more with other mental health issues, but depression, 5 million kids. The Cleveland Clinic says the best thing you can do to mitigate depression is physical activity.

And so, I look at that and say, well, why won't we do more? You know, when I got this job my first week on the job my director of marketing said, oh, we're going to have a pop-a-shot out at the fair, and people can come, and we're going to give out hand sanitizer. And I said, don't give out hand sanitizer. Please don't give out hand sanitizer. I said our job is to help kids get their hands dirty. And my director of marketing said, well, but after they get their hands dirty, they need to clean them. I'm like, oh, so you already paid for the hand sanitizer. [Laughter.] Yes, is the answer. We give out hand sanitizer because I was, like, well, this already has our logo on there. [Laughter.]

So, we're going to start. And we're – the project's called the Marvella Project. Senator Birch Bayh from Indiana wrote Title IX, sponsored it, and with the help of a lot of women who were fighting hard for it, to include his wife, Marvella who was denied college entrance because she couldn't get financial aid. So, Marvella Bayh was the inspiration for Birch writing Title IX. So, we're naming the project – this whole complex in her memory. So, it's the Marvella Project. We'll build one in Indiana. We have 100 acres. It's between Indiana and Chicago.

The goal will be to create that in Indiana, and then we'll build four more around the country. Saying just, you know, this is how you take advantage of this moment to make it a movement, is you really double down and say, this is – sports brings people together, you know, and that's – we joke a lot about. But when there's a great shot, you high five the person next to you and you don't ask them who they voted for before you high five them. It's just there's something special about sports. So, we want to do more. [Applause.]

MR. DI RITA: That's nice. That's fantastic. I mean, the vision is brilliant. But this is a year-round facility that – I mean, so the kids will come for weekends, for weeks? I mean, how does that –

MS. BARBER: We'll build it out for – it'll have clinics, conferences, leadership seminars for girls. So, it will be a year-round facility. And then we'll plug and play weekend tournaments and then other activities for families when they come with their girls.

MR. DI RITA: That's wonderful.

MS. BARBER: Thanks.

MR. DI RITA: That's fantastic.

MS. BARBER: Well, thanks.

MR. DI RITA: Well, congratulations.

MS. BARBER: Well, thanks. We're just \$98 million short of being done. [Laughter.]

MR. DI RITA: Yeah. So, we're passing the hat after this.

MS. BARBER: Yeah, that's right.

MR. DI RITA: Anyway, from the – from the club that has any questions? I left a lot on the table when it comes to the Fever for Caitlin or anything else. Any questions from the team? Yeah, Kim, please.

Q: So, thank you. This has been really lovely. Clearly, there's a thread with you through all the different – oh. Thank you. Clearly there's a thread with you that is great leadership. So, I would love to hear just your philosophy on leadership and things that, you know, you've been inspiring, and you've done such amazing work. I'd love to understand, like, what is that common thread? What is it that you use to inspire your staff everywhere you go?

MS. BARBER: Thank you for the question. You know, years ago there was this movement around writing your – it was in "Tuesdays with Morrie," write your eulogy. And so, a lot of years ago, I wrote my eulogy. And I thought, if I could figure out what I want somebody to say about me when I die, then that'll teach me how to live. And I landed on this word of

“contribution.” And I think that that is really it’s probably the schoolteacher in me. My great grandparents were immigrants from the Middle East to Gary, Indiana. They just – you know, they made a path.

And when you – when you come from that beginning and you realize that people give you opportunity and it’s your job to give it back, then contribution has really driven every decision I’ve made in the careers that I’ve chosen. And that really probably influences my leadership style, of how can I help you develop and become the best version of yourself, to me, is really my job as a leader. And so, you know, sometimes that’s easy. It’s really easy to lead people who are built like you and work and think like you. It’s challenging to help people grow and develop when they’re not like you. But as a leader, that’s your job. And don’t paint your vision statement on a locker room wall. Like, that I learned. [Laughter.]

MR. DI RITA: Yeah, no, there’s – pictures.

Please.

Q: Dr. Barber, thank you very much for your comments. I’m the Iowan who can’t shoot a logo three. But by – both for your new role and your role at the Fever, from your perspective where do you see the trajectory of women’s sports going? Like, how do you build on this moment, you know, from elementary school, through high school, through college, through pro? Where do you see things going?

MS. BARBER: I think the future is very bright. You know, the WNBA just inked a \$2.2 billion media deal at 6x more than any media deal they’ve had. There is something about being able to see sports for girls to continue to want to be in that space. It’s really true for all of us in our careers. You do it. You’re mentors. I know you are. I know how this town works. You show the path to other people. If they can see it, they can be it. That’s real. It’s true in sports. So having a \$2.2 billion media deal. We just announced an expand – we announced that publicly, right? So – [laughs] – three now. So, we have three new WNBA teams.

That kind of momentum matters. And if you look at the past of sports, you have to have good rivalry, you have to have teams in the right cities, and you have to have the media deal. I think it will continue. But what we have now that we didn’t have back when the NBA started years ago with Title IX, what we do now have is social media. So, with the Fever, I just got a report, we just hit 1 billion views of digital content. Now, we’ve only played 36 games. So, this is a – since May, 1 billion views of digital content – on our digital content.

Compare that to the Pacers, who are great, and they had a good run deep into the playoffs. They broke their own record with 483 million views. We’re at 1 billion. We’ve had a 1,193 percent increase in jersey sales. We’ve had 36 of our games on national TV. Last year we had one. So, these things – my mascot, not with me in it thankfully – but my mascot’s invitations to appear have gone up 150 percent, for the mascot. Not with a player, just the mascot. These are signals to me that the momentum is going to continue to grow, and it’s good.

MR. DI RITA: You talked about the expansion – thanks a lot for the question. You talked about the expansion. So, 15 teams now, plus or minus one. How do you think – what’s the thinking on that? I mean, do you kind of hold it?

MS. BARBER: We’ll get to 16. We’ll go one more, and we’ll get to 16, and hold there is the plan.

MR. DI RITA: Yeah. And how – so the model has been for the players, basically, in the off season go overseas and play. But that sounds like that’s starting to change a little bit too. The compensation for the players is –

MS. BARBER: That’s right, Larry. So, Cathy Engelbert, our commissioner, I know she’s been here too, she created a team marketing agreement so we can actually put players on marketing agreements, so they don’t have to go overseas to – usually they go overseas to make more money in the off season. So now, physically, that’s hard. They’re playing 12 months out of the year. I mean, it’s just – the average player in the WNBA is there four years. So, four years, that’s it for their career. Which is why David Stern said they have to have college degrees, because he didn’t think this would be a long-term career. And that’s true. It wasn’t. It could be, but not yet.

So, they now don’t have to go overseas, because they can get a marketing agreement. And then with this new media deal, we’ll be able to – we’re going into collective bargaining. So, then it remains to be seen what the players want to negotiate as it relates to salaries. But we now have resources that we can come to the table and have thoughtful and good conversations that will help that.

MR. DI RITA: Yeah. That’s great. Other questions from – please. Wait for the mic.

Q: So, I have an eleven-year-old daughter that plays travel basketball. And you cannot underestimate the effect that this has on her. She thinks this is normal, because since she has been – [applause] – so, I want to thank you. And the thing about this that is most amazing – by the way, she wanted me to bring Caitlin’s jersey to you have her – you get her to sign it, and she’s going to go to the game today. Sorry, Sheila, but in an Indiana Fevers jersey. She said, I’ll just pick it up at the game when I go. That was her idea. [Laughter.]

But the thing about Caitlin Clark that’s the most amazing to me is she always seems to say the right thing. Like she never lashes out in anger. And she’s not a saint on the court, right? I mean, she’s tough. And how – to me, that’s something that all of our athletes can learn, right, in the NBA and the WNBA, in the NFL. And how do you – how do you get that – spread that word? Like, how can you teach everyone that that rising tide, that lifts all ships? And that’s my thought.

MS. BARBER: Yeah. This is where I will tell you, Caitlin is one of one. I don’t – I met and worked with a lot of great people. I don’t know anybody like Caitlin, in that she’s 22, she’s a multimillionaire, carrying the burden and the weight of this pressure on her shoulders, and is, you know, great with the media, I mean, and knows how to handle each situation really well. I sent her a note one day and I said, you know, the best part of taking the high road, Caitlin, is

there's no traffic. [Laughter.] And I think she just demonstrates that. And I think people will be inspired by that. They'll take it on, if they choose to, they'll learn from it.

But she's very unique. And so, I'm not sure just anybody could learn that, because it's really part of her family upbringing, her Iowa roots, her coaches. They've built this into Caitlin that she's – you know, we accept this in every other area. If you're going for surgery, open heart surgery, you're going to go to the best specialist in the world, right? Every other area we accept that there are specialists that are unlike anyone else, and that's true about Caitlin.

MR. DI RITA: Yeah. Please.

Q: I'm so excited to be here. I am an AAU – former AAU mom, and a huge fan. I'm a Mystics fan. And we'll definitely be at the game tonight. And having sat in those arenas for years, I'm curious to know, statistically, how has the demographic of the attendees and ticketholders changed?

MS. BARBER: You know, I was so thrilled. We have great fans in the WNBA, true. My fans – somebody said to me, I'm so thrilled with this new crowd because when we became season ticketholders, everybody in the arena looked just like us. And now they don't. At my game on Sunday, our camera folks found a man sitting there holding up a sign, feebly, because it says: Today is my 90th birthday, and I wanted to see Caitlin Clark play for my birthday – 90. And then we have people with infants with headphones on to protect their hearing. And it's everything in between.

I was telling Susan, I was in northwest Indiana – a small, small town in Indiana. I stopped for some chicken rice soup – lemon rice soup, because it's the best at this Greek restaurant. And the owner of the restaurant sees my F logo on my shirt, and he goes, oh, have you ever been to a Fever game? [Laughter.] And I was dumbfounded.

MR. DI RITA: [Laughs.] Took out the mascot costume, put it on. [Laughter.]

MS. BARBER: He wants tickets, \$400, balcony. I couldn't believe that he, in this small town of Indiana, recognized the F, because it's in the Chicago market so they know Chicago, they wouldn't know an Indie team. Oh yes. I said, actually, I do get to go to the games, interestingly enough. So, we chatted. I told him I was the president. I go to my car. He follows me out with his phone. He said, would you say hi to my father? He's a big fan. And he turns his phone around. Now I'm FaceTiming with this man. [Laughter.] His dad is like, this is the president of the Fever. And, OK. And he said – the father says, I love your games. I watch all of them. I have to stay up till five in the morning to watch your games. I said, why? Where are you? He goes, oh, I live in Greece. [Laughter.]

MR. DI RITA: Oh, my God. That's remarkable.

MS. BARBER: So, this, you know, the demographics have – it's global, for sure. And it's good for all of us. You know, we go – my opening game was in Connecticut. It was a sellout. Lots of people wearing the blue T-shirt because for the first time in the history of Dick's Sporting Good

they carry a shirt with a name and number for one player in all of their stores. So everywhere I go, I see Caitlin Clark T-shirts from Dick's. But we lost that first game. And as a businessperson, I was OK with that, because what happened is Caitlin drew new fans to the Connecticut arena that had never seen a W game.

And so, I was happy that a new field –

MR. DI RITA: Yeah, their team won.

MS. BARBER: And their team won, because it builds momentum for that team. I mean, I would not tell my coach that. So, if you see my coach don't tell her –

MR. DI RITA: No, as noted, we're 100 percent off the record.

MS. BARBER: Yes, exactly.

MR. DI RITA: Other questions for Allison? Any questions? So, your teacher background, the average age of the – or the average tenure on your team is three years. And the Aces, just to compare, is six years. So does that youth difference matter? I mean, how – I mean, it matters, obviously, because they're younger and more, maybe, better players, I don't know.

MS. BARBER: Yeah, I think you can apply these to your careers. You think about when you were in your first job and you're so excited that you got your PowerPoint presentation put together for your boss, who got to brief the boss, who briefed the boss, and you feel good about it. But you're – and then in a few more years, you know, you are the boss, you know. So there comes this confidence, the competencies, also this emotional levelness of the players. You know, you win some games, you lose some games. That's how it goes. And you don't – Dawn Staley, the coach from South Carolina, says it all the time. Don't let your highs get too high, your lows get too lows.

But when we all started in our career, everything was high because we're anxious and nervous and, you know, you don't have a lot to draw from. I do think that the teams that have these seasoned players, you kind of expect that they're going to pull – even if they're down, you kind of expect they're going to win because they know how to win. When I got this job, I did a quick research about the teams that had won championships. And every team in the history of the history of the W who won a championship, they either had an all-star or an Olympian, at least one, on every team that won a championship. So, I immediately looked at my roster. I had zero. And for several years, I had zero. And so, there's a reason for that, that there comes the skillset and ability to win. And they know how to win.

MR. DI RITA: Sure. Yeah.

Well, listen, I know we're getting close to the bottom of the hour. I do want to thank Mary and the club. Sheila, wonderful to see you. And, Gina, thanks so much. Allison, congratulations. It's just an amazing – you've had an amazing ride. We're looking very much forward to hearing about your next success.

MS. BARBER: Thank you. Thank you.

MR. DI RITA: It is exciting to – I'll just put another plug in for the club – because everybody in this room right now is one degree of separation from the president of the United States and from Caitlin Clark. [Laughter.] So that's not bad, Economic Club of D.C. But thank you very much. [Applause.]



**Allison Barber, Ph.D.
President and COO
Indiana Fever**

With a career that spans from a schoolhouse to the White House and now to the Fieldhouse, Allison Barber has a successful record of building brands and maximizing impact. From grade schoolteacher in Merrillville, Indiana, to communications strategist in the White House and United States Department of Defense; and as the first chancellor and chief fundraiser for Western Governor's University (WGU) Indiana, Barber has dedicated herself to creating pathways to help

individuals reach their potential.

Now, as the President and COO of the Indiana Fever, she has set her sights on building and inspiring Fever fans in all 92 counties of Indiana. Barber understands the power of playing sports, a college athlete who lettered in tennis and softball, she values the positive impact sports can have on both children and adults.

Barber holds a B.S. in Elementary Education from Tennessee Temple University; an M.S. in Elementary Education from Indiana University; and a Ph.D. in Leadership from Tennessee Temple University. She is the recipient of the Department of Defense Medal for Distinguished Public Service awarded by Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld and was recognized as a Woman of Influence by the Indianapolis Business Journal.

In March 2019, she was presented with Indiana's highest honor, the Sagamore of the Wabash, presented by Governor Eric Holcomb. Barber is the board chair for the Sagamore Institute and serves on the boards of the American Red Cross, Indiana Destination Development Corporation, and the Indiana Chamber. She volunteers for the Elizabeth Dole Hidden Heroes Foundation, Wheeler Mission and NBA All-Star 2024.