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***Joining Forces for Women Veterans: Inaugural Summit Draws
Attention, Participation of White House and Key Agencies;
Convenes Government, Employers and Women Veterans for Action***

Washington, DC – Valerie B. Jarrett, Senior Advisor and Assistant to the President for Intergovernmental Affairs and Public Engagement and Chair of the White House Council on Women and Girls addressed the more than 60 participants this morning who gathered to raise awareness and develop solutions to key challenges faced by women veterans.

“What you are doing with this Summit is exactly the type of thing we need,” stated Jarrett. And after announcing a White House report on providing economic security for America’s women, Jarrett stressed that the White House’s focus on women and girls includes women veterans. Jarrett also commented that government cannot do this alone, and that “public/private partnership is really critical.”

Jarrett was followed by Tammy Duckworth, Assistant Secretary for Public & Intergovernmental Affairs, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, who also complimented the Summit as “a perfect example of public private collaboration” in support of women veterans. Addressing the employers in the audience, Duckworth provided examples of the transferable skills that many women veterans possess upon exiting the military. “A platoon leader is in charge of managing every aspect of the lives of up to 40 men and women – everything from drawing up complex battle plans to helping them balance their checkbooks.... and they understand deadlines.”

“BPW Foundation is thrilled to stand up for this country’s women veterans,” said Deborah Frett, CEO of BPW Foundation. “Our role is to convene employers, employees and policy makers in order to help solve the issues facing women veterans as they enter the workplace. We listened to what they had to say and this Summit marks just the beginning of our joint effort.”

During a panel discussion on Reintegration, Veronica Harrison, a woman veteran who until just last May was homeless, highlighted the fact that “women veterans need advocates who will focus on our unique needs.” Dr. Linda Spoonster Schwartz, Commissioner of Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs, noted “being a hero does not get you a job, fix your marriage or pay the bills. That is where you (the participants of this Summit) come in.”

Sara Manzano-Diaz, Director, Women’s Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor, discussed the factors that lead women veterans to become homeless: care-giving for children, divorce and military sexual trauma (MST). The audience was struck by emotion as another panelist, a woman veteran who had endured decades of homelessness and PTSD, shared her story.

The lunch speaker, Marie Collins Johns, Deputy Director, Small Business Administration, thanked BPW Foundation “for having the vision to convene this event.” She shared information about several programs under the purview of SBA, designed to help veterans establish their own small businesses. Johns is also heading up the Veterans Interagency Task Force for the Obama Administration.

Following Johns was Michele S. Jones, Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense; White House Liaison, U.S. Department of Defense. She delivered a rousing speech and spoke directly to the women veterans in attendance, and said that they needed to stand together on behalf of all women veterans. Recalling the Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) code to “never leave a fallen comrade behind,” Jones was adamant that the code includes women during and after they leave the military.

The Employment and Careers panel featured another representative from the Department of Labor, Ray Jefferson, Assistant Secretary for the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS). Jefferson highlighted the significant and numerous improvements in the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) program that are being implemented. He concluded his eloquent remarks by telling the BPW Foundation Summit participants that "your lives are the candles that will light the way for women veterans in the future."

Susan Schieren, Manager, Military Programs for General Electric and another panelist for Employment and Careers noted that at General Electric, "veterans have demonstrated that they have the skills necessary to become senior executives." She declared that the Summit "exceeded all her expectations!"

Concluding the speakers' remarks, Ana Harvey, Assistant Administrator, Office of Women's Business Ownership, U.S. Small Business Administration, requested of the audience: "Here is how I need your help. I need to know how to serve women veterans best, and I need your help in defining what they need."

There was a surprise announcement at the conclusion of the panel discussions. Dan Nichols, Executive Director of INOVA's *Military to Medicine* program, announced that they will partner with BPW Foundation to provide 10 scholarships to women veterans to provide training for careers in medicine. A key component of the *Military to Medicine* program is to secure employment upon program completion.

One of the women veterans that spoke during the day, Jessica Campbell, remarked that she "wasn't broken enough to qualify for help" from the programs that are set up to aid veterans. In response, a representative from CompTIA Educational Foundation (a sponsor of the Summit), commented that "there are lots of services, and too many places to go to for help. How do we help women veterans navigate? What are some of the possible IT solutions that are out there?"

The Summit ended with a discussion of several proposed solutions, innovative responses and action outlines – all of which highlighted collaboration between the different sectors that attended *Joining Forces for Women Veterans: Inaugural Summit*.

When discussing Summit outcomes and solutions, several businesses including Cisco Systems, INOVA's *Military to Medicine* and Macy's spoke about instituting roundtables to discuss the issues of female veteran employees and how to best support them. "This proactive decision-making is the reason we held this Summit," stated Roslyn Ridgeway, Chair of BPW Foundation's Board of Trustees.

Business and Professional Women's (BPW) Foundation is a 501(c) (3) research and education organization that is transforming the workplace for women and employers. Through groundbreaking research and as a convener of employers and employees, BPW Foundation leads the way in developing and advocating for policies and programs that "work" for both women and businesses. www.bpwfoundation.org

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