

## Portia Linnea Palmer obituary



Portia Linnea Palmer, a Hyde Park-Kenwood native and public servant, died February 6 in Tallahassee, Florida, of natural causes. She was 63 years old. Ms. Palmer enjoyed an exciting, high-profile career in government. Most recently, she served as director of strategic initiatives and special projects in the Florida College System for the Florida Department of Education. Prior to that, she was appointed as clerk of the Florida House of Representatives in 2016, the first African-American woman to hold that position. Her responsibilities included performing the ministerial duties for the 120- member House.

Ms. Palmer served her country as a political appointee during the George W. Bush administration in the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development. Ms. Palmer was USAID's chief spokeswoman with media outlets, as well as internal and external audiences. At the State Department, Ms. Palmer was the primary liaison with governors, mayors and other U.S. elected officials. Other positions in her career include working as the press secretary of the Republican party in Florida, a senior policy advisor for the Miami-Dade County Commission as well as the City of Miami, and serving as chief executive officer of her Washington-based consulting company, Palmer Global Communication Group.

When she wasn't working, Ms. Palmer was seeing the world with friends and family members. Her travels took her to Italy, Aruba, Belgium, West Africa and England, among other destinations. Ms. Palmer loved to write, and collected pens, stationery and notebooks. Her loved ones cherish the beautiful postcards, letters and cards she mailed to them over the years.

Ms. Palmer was educated in Kenwood at the now-shuttered Harvard St. George School. She graduated from the now-closed Aquinas High School on the city's South Side, and Mount Vernon College, renamed George Washington University, in Washington. Known for her flair for fashion, Ms. Palmer loved dressing boldly and frequently sat in the front row of the Ebony Fashion Fair. Her smile and laugh were infectious and she always rooted for the Bears, long after she left Chicago. She was also a proud godmother, a role she cherished.

Ms. Palmer is survived by her brother, Dr. John M. Palmer Jr; her sister, Leslie E. Adkins; her niece, Lenore T. Adkins and her nephew, Philip I. Adkins, a cousin, Valerie Phillips and her children Luxha and Andres. Portia's parents, Dr. John M. Palmer and Theresa M. Palmer, preceded her in death.

Funeral arrangements will be March 4 at 10 a.m. at St. Thomas the Apostle Church, 5472 S. Kimbark Ave., Chicago, IL, followed by a repast at Augustana Lutheran Church, 5500 S. Woodlawn Ave., at 12:30 p.m.

## **Farewell Portia, We Will All Miss You.**

LinkedIn Article, March 4, 2023

Today, we bid farewell to our former State Department and USAID Colleague, Friend and Leader, Ms. Portia Linnea Palmer:

In honor of Portia's service to our nation, we offer just a few words from all of us who served with her in government and appreciated her enduring friendship:

First, the things we loved about Portia:

- Her humor and self-deprecating style disarmed hostile reporters and helped her achieve great things in government service and in public affairs to which she dedicated much of her professional life.
- Her commitment to her faith was deep and it grounded her throughout her life.
- She was a "Master Communicator" who excelled at the organizational communications and message delivery. She led many aspects of the global media and public affairs shop at the State Dept. and USAID.
- Her professionalism, mutual respect, knowledge and skills were on display to all of us everyday. That is why she helped conduct leadership events for the President, First Lady, Secretary of State and multiple USAID Administrators.
- She never shied away from the challenge of "doing good" for the American people. This was evidenced to us in her service within State and USAID but also overseas in conflict zones like Iraq and Afghanistan. When interviewed about her previous U.S Government service (as she assumed her new role as Clerk of the Florida House of Representatives) Portia stated:
- "This conflict zone work adds a layer and challenge to the work—you don't always have connectivity, so you have to be creative. You're doing your work and surviving. I'm not a rugged type of person, but you get acclimated...It trains you in a certain type of way."
- Lastly, Portia helped manage major public affairs campaigns for the U.S. Government including at the UN Summit on Sustainable Development in 2008 held in Accra, Ghana. This was the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness for all OECD donors nations and more than 80 developing countries and some 3

000 civil society organizations from around the world. The U.S, United Nations, other Donor states and multilateral institutions and global funds joined in negotiations leading up to and taking place during the Accra meeting. The Accra Action Agenda (AAA) was endorsed and the AAA reaffirmed an international commitment to the Paris Declaration principles and calls for greater partnership between different parties working on aid and development.

- Portia was instrumental in planning and implementing the messaging and public affairs aspects of this global event that helped people throughout the developing world and made foreign assistance more accountable and transparent for American taxpayers.

#### The Things we never knew about Portia till now:

- Her middle name was Linnea. What does Linnea mean? It is of Scandinavian origin, and means "lime or linden tree " but also a small pink mountain flower.
- She was the daughter of a physician who volunteered his services around the world.
- She spent a year in high school in Tanzania while her father taught surgery in Dar Es Saleem. She was introduced to the State Dept and American diplomatic life through those Africa ventures.
- We knew she was from Chicago and a Bears fan for life but did not know she was a native of Hyde Park and Kenwood.
- She was the first African-American Women to hold the job as Clerk of the Florida House. In her job as Clerk, she took her responsibilities very seriously, as she later conveyed to a Florida journalist:
- "My favorite responsibility (in the office of the Clerk) is that I'm a keeper of the reputation of the seal of the Florida House. My second favorite thing is being the custodian of the bills. I personally sign every bill. I don't use an autopen because that helps me understand what's important to my clients (the 120 reps in the House) and their constituents. "
- We knew she was a bold dresser as she loved bright colors and fashionable dress but never knew she attended the Ebony Fashion Fair.

Portia is survived by her brother Dr. John Palmer Jr. and her sister Leslie Adkins. May God Bless You Portia, and your family, we will miss you. Rest knowing you led a life well-lived, and the world was much better off because of your service.

#### **Jeffrey Grieco**

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