



Commercial Club picks U of C's Derek Douglas as new chief

By Greg Hinz

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A former Barack Obama aide turned university administrator is taking over the helm of one of Chicago's key business groups.

In an announcement today, the Commercial Club of Chicago and its Civic Committee announced that Derek R.B. Douglas, now vice president of civic engagement and external affairs at the University of Chicago, will be their new president.

Douglas will be the first person of color to lead the organizations, which represent the Chicago area's largest foundations and play an active behind-the-scenes role at City Hall, in Springfield and in Washington.

"I am honored to be selected," said Douglas, 51, in a statement. "The organizations have a tremendous history of addressing critical issues facing the Chicago region from transportation and infrastructure, education, fiscal policy, public safety and economic development, including driving inclusive expansion of Chicago's tech economy. I am eager to continue this important work in my new role."

Douglas will succeed Kelly Welsh—a one-time top aide to former Mayor Richard M. Daley and ex-U.S. Commerce Secretary Penny Pritzker—[who earlier had announced his retirement](#).

Douglas has worked at U of C for 10 years, among other tasks running its Washington, D.C., government relations unit. The announcement stressed his experience in economic and community development and violence reduction, likely a sign of the subjects he will stress when he takes over later this summer.

Previously, he worked on the White House Domestic Policy Council as special assistant to President Barack Obama, directing its Urban Policy Office, where he advised President Obama on urban and metropolitan policy issues. Douglas holds an economic degree from the University of Michigan and graduated from Yale Law School.

This is not the first time the Commercial Club, the group which commissioned the iconic Burnham Plan for Chicago, has turned to academia for a leader. Among others who recently have held the job is former Northwestern University President Arnold Weber.