



Be Bold For Change

Annual Anchorage ATHENA Luncheon - March 20, 2017

Remarks by Keynote Speaker, Fran Ulmer

“Don’t talk about politics”

So cannot do what I’d like to do, talk about

-How to solve Alaska’s fiscal problems

-How to restore integrity and respect to our democracy

-How to reduce the risks to society from a rapidly changing climate that will dramatically alter life as we know it today

Instead, I am going to talk about a completely politics-free topic: the progress of women in our society!

March 8, 2017 International Women’s Day celebration was around the world. The theme this year was

“Be Bold For Change” to forge a better working world, and develop a more gender inclusive world.

I was in Juneau last week and by chance I happened to attend a reception at the Alaska State Museum on March 8, where I saw an special exhibit, titled “Unheard Voices, Unheard Wisdom” a stunning and alarming exhibit on domestic violence and sexual assault. Viewers were reminded that 50% of adult women in Alaska have experienced personal violence in their lifetime. (2015 study by UAA Justice Center.)

Two quotes from this exhibit connected me to the ATHENA event today, one from the exhibit’s artist, Carmel Anderson, and another by Madeleine Albright, former Secretary of State.

Ms. Anderson: *“My paintings and sculptures have focused on the subject of the inner strength and wisdom of women, using visual symbols and metaphors to*

connect with the viewer. I seek to help viewers discover and embrace their talents, insights, and goodness to help create a kinder and more peaceful world. For women to live their most purposeful stories, they need to be intentional about healing their own wounds."

And Ms. Albright: *"There is a special place in hell for women who do not help women. "*

Isn't that what ATHENA is all about? Women helping women, heal their wounds, find their most purposeful lives, puzzle through life's dilemmas, advance in their careers, and make progress for society?

I am grateful for organizations that lift up women and the progress that has been made in the last century for breaking down barriers. Grateful for organizations like **AWAIC and STAR and the Domestic Violence Network and YWCA and Girl Scouts and ATHENA**. I am grateful for changes in federal and state laws that provide a more level playing field, like Title Nine and, for that matter, the 19st amendment to the constitution ratified in 1920 that gave women the right to vote in our country. (By the way, in Alaska it was 1912).

My mother was born before women could vote, and she remembered the excitement when the campaign for women suffrage – a 70 year battle – was finally successful. She became the first woman elected to the school board in our small town in Wisconsin...and she bequeathed to me the gift of this attitude: being a woman should never be a limiting factor!

Clearly, women like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott who organized the first women's rights convention at Seneca Falls, NY in 1848, also believed that being a woman should not be a limiting factor.

Susan B. Anthony and many others joined the effort to provide better opportunities for education, employment, and property rights for women. They were ridiculed, imprisoned, force fed, abused and largely ignored by the establishment. But they persevered. They lived the International Women's Day motto: Be Bold For Change. As a result, you can own property, have your own bank account, go to law school or become a jet pilot. And largely make decisions

on what is best for you, for your health, for your family's well-being without having your choices be approved in writing by your father or husband.

If you want to know more about this important chapter in our history, visit the Belmont-Paul Women's Equality National Monument in DC, which was headquarters for the suffrage and equal right movement.

In spite of significant progress in the 20th Century, there are still significant challenges for women in our country and in our world.

Pay inequality remains a stubbornly difficult challenge. The World Economic Forum predicts that the gender gap won't be closed until **2186**. In Alaska, we don't want to wait that long!

Women are 48% of the workforce in Alaska, and are paid 67cents for every dollar a man makes, making us 48th in the nation. Congress passed the Fair Pay Act in 1963, but 54 years later, the pay gap nationally is 78 cents/one dollar. That is why YWCA Alaska has initiated a new project to build community and business support for making progress on pay equity. It's called the **EconEquity Initiative** – THE GOAL is to eliminate the gender pay gap by 2025. It's based on four parts: working with and supporting employers to build equitable workplaces to attract top talent; concentrating on the economics of improving the situation for families; education and training programs for women and girls focused on career choice and salary negotiation; and an a-political approach, avoiding legislative or political routes as solutions. Join the movement by going to ywcaak.org

A recent McKinsey Global Institute study released last year titled "Women Matter 2016: Reinventing the Workplace to unlock the potential of gender diversity" shows that progress is very slow in another arena as well: the number of women on corporate boards: less than 19% in USA corporate boards, compared to 32% in Western Europe. The most frequent path to large and medium size corporate board invitations is a personal recommendation from a current board member. Yes, search firms are also part of the process, but it remains the old boys club in many ways. I was honored to be invited to join the FNBA Board of Directors a few years ago, an Alaska bank, with a woman as President and Chairman of the board, Betsy Lawer. (I might add that FNBA is a proud endorser of the YWCA Alaska

EconEquity initiative.) It certainly helps to have more women reaching out to other women to join boards, but it is also essential for women to search out opportunities, network, make yourself available, and build the career and life experiences that will help you open more doors.

The McKinsey study called Women in the Workplace 2016 looks at other inequities, including percentage of managerial positions, promotions, training opportunities, etc. all show significant disparity...and the differences are even more pronounced for women of color.

Which brings me to my movie recommendation for the day.

Hidden Figures. The true story about three brilliant African American women – mathematicians- working for NASA, and their contributions to the successful launch of astronaut John Glenn into orbit. Against many odds and much hostility, the trio crossed all gender and race lines, with grace, courage and intelligence. This is an inspiring story that will remind you that women are powerful agents of change.

And **you** are too!

Each of you in your own way, can and do bring forward the ways in which women helping women can make progress for current and future generations. At a time when some progress seems to be on hold or backsliding in ways that are alarming, it is more important than ever that we move forward, push forward and find the challenge where you can: **Be Bold For Change.**

That might be health care, child care, homelessness, immigration reform, education reform, conservation, or

Whatever heals you, moves you, inspires you to help future generations of women become the ATHENAs they were meant to be. **Be Bold For Change.**