



Big Strides, Diverse Paths: Women's Journeys to Political Leadership

Part I: Welcomes and Introduction

March 5, 2009

The influence of women has redefined the nature of politics, but how did they get there and what are the stories of their political journeys? On March 5th, 2009, **Eleanor Clift**, weekly panelist on The McLaughlin Group and author of *Madame President*, moderated a discussion featuring of women who have come from a variety of backgrounds, represent different levels of political activity, and have played leadership roles in politics.

Part I: Welcomes and Introduction

Thora Colot, Executive Director of the Foundation for the National Archives; **Sue Gin McGowan**, President, The William G. McGowan Charitable Fund; and **Carol Hardy-Fanta**, Director of the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts Boston's John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy Studies.

This program was presented in partnership with the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy at the University of Massachusetts Boston's McCormack Graduate School.

THORA COLOT: So welcome, everybody, to our magnificent, our beautiful William G. McGowan Theater. I'm Thora Colot. I'm the Executive Director of the Foundation for the National Archives and a proud partner building this new museum complex here in the historic Washington, D.C. building. And we'd like to call it the National Archives Experience. And do you also know that the National Archives is actually celebrating its 75th birthday this year? Now I personally endorse a very long and extended birthday party, and that's what we're going to do here--we're going to do it all year long. So I recommend that you go upstairs on your way out and sign up for your calendar listing so that you can get all the information about the great programs and events that are going to be going on here at the National Archives all year long, including our newest special exhibition, which will be opening next Friday--and I like Friday the 13ths--called "Big!": Big records, big events, and big ideas in American history. This is going to be fun. It's really, really great,



and it really speaks to the surprises and the discoveries that are here at the National Archives.

Now if you guys have already been here and visited and explored the Rotunda upstairs, or our Public Vaults exhibitions, or any of our other special exhibitions, or even had an opportunity to go into our Learning Center and try one of our archival adventures, or even two of them, then you've started to notice, and you've started to understand that many of the documents held by the National Archives are evidence of our nation's ongoing skirmishes in the continual struggle for true independence. We as a nation have cherished words such as independence, liberty, and equality, but we've been through many difficult times giving the entire nation each individual ownership of their true meaning.

In two months from now it's going to be the anniversary--90 years--90 years--do you all know what happened on May 19, 1919?Tadum! It is a facsimile. It's not the real thing. But it is the joint resolution proposing an amendment to the Constitution--"the rights of citizens of the United States "to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States" or by any state on account of sex." The 19th amendment passed by Congress on May 19, 1919 was ratified August 18, 1920. Women got the right to vote. And I always think who would have thought we didn't have the right to vote. But anyway, since then we've continued to not only participate in but lead in the work to give every citizen the ownership of freedom and equality. The women that will take the stage this evening have not only voted alongside us, but have taken on voting for us, representing important issues in the House, in the Senate, and in capitals across the nation.

Our welcome tonight is being given by another kind of power broker--Sue Gin McGowan--and, yes, you have heard that name before this evening when I welcomed you to the William G. McGowan Theater. Sue Gin McGowan--her family and members of the William G. McGowan Charitable Fund's contribution to the National Archives Experience made this state-of-the-art theater a reality, and we thank you again for that. She continues in her quest for, and her success of, excellence. Sue is a model of business entrepreneurship. She formed Flying Food Group in 1983, providing fresh food products to passengers of airlines. In 1996 she also formed Fresh Food Solutions, providing private label packaged foods to many various retail partners. Today, in addition to being president of Dew Management, Ltd., she's also active on many boards of various civic organizations, including the Field Museum and the Chicago Botanical Gardens.

I'm very proud to welcome Sue Gin McGowan to the stage and have her welcome you and start the Second Annual Women in Leadership Forum. This is the second year and we plan for many more. Sue Gin, come on stage.

SUE GIN MCGOWAN: Good evening, I'm Sue Gin McGowan, and I'm welcoming you on behalf of the William G. McGowan Charitable Fund, established in the memory of my late husband, Bill McGowan, who died in 1992.



As president of the Funds board, I would like to give you some background on the Women in Leadership program today. Big Strides, Diverse Paths: Women's Journey to Political Leadership. Six years ago the McGowan Fund partnered with the National Archives to develop this theater right here in the Nation's Capital. Soon after we established the theater, we then established an Annual Fall Forum, where we had subjects such as commerce, technology, and government. Bill McGowan loved history, movies, debating the great issues of the day, and I was gratified when the McGowan Foundation could work with the National Archives to ensure an ongoing conversation about important topics. Enthused audience response and top quality discussions, generated by our first forum series, inspired our board last year to establish a second series of public forums, spotlighting women in business, politics, journalism, academia, the arts, science, and medicine. This was the genesis of the Women in Leadership's program.

Our initial forum, which took place herein the McGowan Theater last June, was Citizen's by Choice. It evoked a lively, candid conversation with several women panelists who are naturalized U.S. Citizens and have become leaders in their chosen professions. That program had great meaning for me because I'm the founder of Flying Food Group, as they said before, and I sit on the boards of several Chicago-based institutions and corporations. As a Chinese-American woman I have faced obstacles that had little to do with my talent or productivity, but much more to do with preconceptions about my gender and ethnicity. It is essential that the Women in Leadership program help sustain open discussion about the forces and factors facing women today. These are very challenging economic times and they demand a level-playing field. Although women have broken many barriers, there is still much to do. Recently, U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Rodham Clinton, addressed a cheering audience of about 2,000 students at a university in Seoul, Korea. Citing her own example, Secretary Clinton explained no country has yet achieved full equality for women.

There is a lot ahead of us to do to make sure that gender equality becomes reality. Her comments underscore the relevance of public dialogue like the outstanding program that we're going to have this evening. Thank you.

COLOT: And I thought I didn't have to come up here and remind everybody to turn off their cell phones. So take that as your reminder. Let's see, no more keys have been found. I think we should start the program.

It's really going to be a dynamic evening. I did want to say though; I was looking for some of my staff. I do believe the last program that was held last year, it really is one of the best, and it's only because this one hasn't happened yet. Everyone was so charismatic, dynamic--the people were really true engineers of progress. It was wonderful. And it should be streaming now on archives.gov and the NAE--National Archives Experience website. So you can look for it there and you can see other programs that we have videotaped and that are streamed so that other people can enjoy them.



I'm going to quickly introduce our partner for the evening so that we can start the program. Carol Hardy-Fanta is Director of the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy at UMASS/Boston's John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy Studies. I think I got that right. She received her Ph.D. in public policy from Brandeis University's Heller school, an MSW from Smith College, and a B.A. from Occidental College. Dr. Hardy-Fanta is author of several publications, and a nationally recognized scholar on Latino politics. Her policy experience is huge and includes welfare reform, substance abuse in criminal justice, community organization, reproductive rights, other health issues, as well as bilingual education. Please welcome our partner for the evening, Carol Hardy-Fanta. Thank you.

CAROL HARDY-FANTA: Thank you, Thora. It's been a real pleasure for the Center for Women in Politics and Public Policy to be selected as the partner for tonight's forum. To join with the National Archives in developing the program for this evening, we found it a real pleasure to work with the staff of the National Archives experience, Susan Clifton and Maria--it's been a real pleasure.

Our center's mission is to promote women's leadership in politics and public policymaking by providing a quality graduate education program, conducting research that makes a difference in women's lives, and serving as a resource for women from diverse communities across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the nation. I'd like to acknowledge two of the staff members who are here tonight, courtesy of the National Archives who are central to carrying out this mission--our Research Director, Krista Kelleher, and Donna Stewardson who is the associate director of our graduate certificate program. I encourage you to speak with them after the program.

As we mark Women's History Month, I'd like to take a few moments to put tonight's panel into a larger historical and even global perspective. There are many aspects to women's political leadership that deserve attention. From the importance of the women's vote in presidential politics, in terms of the outcome of elections, the grassroots organizing that women do, and their civic engagement that makes a difference in daily lives of communities and people around the nation, to non-electoral public service as a way for making a difference in people's lives, all the way to being candidates at the presidential level. This election, obviously, we saw a major shift in the presidential politics in terms of gender.

Tonight we have chosen to focus, however, on women's leadership in two arenas--in Congress, and in statewide-elected office. As many of you in the audience may know, women make up more than 50% of the population of the United States, but just 17% of Congress, and just 7 of the governors in the United States are women--that's just 14%, and that's down from eight with the selection of Kathleen Sibelius to be on the Obama cabinet, that has reduced the number of governors from 8 to 7, assuming she is confirmed. And that's even lower than the high of 9 back in 2004 and 2007. What you may not know is



the United States ranks 71st among democratic countries in the world in terms of the percent of their national parliaments or congresses who are women. So that the congress women that you're going to hear from tonight represent a significant accomplishment, but those statistics also point to the fact that the United States is not doing very well compared to the rest of the world in terms of women's political representation at the highest level of government. And the United States has not elected a woman president ever, or vice president, and there are many women presidents or prime ministers around the world--Germany, Chile, Argentina, Canada has had a prime minister, Liberia. Many countries have elected high-level women. The United States is not a model internationally for women's political achievement. So this panel is particularly important, not only for talking about how women become elected to high-level office, but as an inspiration for women who are in the audience who are perhaps thinking of a career in that way themselves.

One of the things that research has shown us is that the concept of how do women reach a high-level office is based too much on theories related--that are stemming from views of white men. Traditional political science theories based on white men suggests that there's a pipeline to office that--well, you start young, you build on family connections, you go into business and law, you seek and move up from lower-level offices to higher-level office. And it's very heavy on individualism and rampant personal ambition. Our research on gender and multi-cultural leadership suggests that there may not be one path or a pipeline to elected office, that just as our country is diverse and that gender brings in new perspectives on political leadership, that there may be diverse and complex ways that women become interested in and move into elected office.

So I'm looking to this panel tonight to share some of those diverse ways that women become—take on political leadership. So I'd like to conclude by introducing our moderator for tonight's panel, Eleanor Clift is well known if you watch any television at all, and her bio is in your program, as are the bios of all of our panelists and participants. Eleanor Clift, however, is a weekly panelist on "The McLaughlin Group" and author of "Madam President." She's going to moderate tonight a panel on women from diverse backgrounds with various experiences in the political arena. And I thank you all for attending tonight. Thank you.

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