

OPENING REMARKS Ideas and opinions

1988: The Year of the Woman

Women are rising through the ranks of the presidential campaign.

Nothing worth doing is completed in our lifetime; Therefore, we must be saved by hope.

—Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr
The Irony of American History

BY KAREN DeCROW

ONE MUST START with the memory that our grandmothers were not allowed to vote.

This year in the entire field of presidential hopefuls there is not one woman. Not one woman was on the stage during those early debates, when the platform was so very crowded.

But, before the obituary is written for the power of the feminist movement in getting women into politics, we must look to not only who is on the stage, but who is behind the stage. And, most important of all, we must look to the wings—local and state offices—for it is there that the pipeline waits to feed women politicians into the national spotlight.

In the 1988 presidential election, women in both major parties hold such key jobs as finance director, deputy campaign manager, press secretary, and state and regional directors. One of the most visible is Susan Estrich, campaign manager for Governor Michael Dukakis. Susan Casey was the director of Gary Hart's campaign. Linda DiVall was pollster for the Robert Dole campaign.

Dr. Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, a former chief United States delegate to the United Nations, appointed by Presi-

dent Reagan and generally acknowledged as being in the Republican right, feels strongly that a woman should run for president, although she took herself out of consideration in October 1987. After Patricia Schroeder left the Democratic presidential race in September 1987, Kirkpatrick told the *New York Times*: "I am sorry that Pat Schroeder withdrew. I think that it was time to have a woman in the race. It would be a good thing to have a woman candidate who held her own and conducted herself with skill and dignity."

Indeed the vast majority of "society" agrees. In 1958, prior to the political organizing of the feminist

movement, only 52 percent of Americans polled by Gallup said they would vote for their party's presidential nominee if she were a woman. By August 1987 this percentage had increased to 82 percent. Interestingly, the results are almost identical when women and men are compared: 81 percent of the men and 83 percent of the women would do so. The greatest discrepancy among groups who support a woman for president is related to educational achievement: 93 percent of college graduates and only 76 percent of high school graduates would vote for a woman for president.

Sadly, at the national level both

Republicans and Democrats have largely turned their backs on women and feminist issues, the Republicans by commission (they removed the Equal Rights Amendment [ERA] from the party platform in 1980 after having the distinction of being the first party to include the amendment in a platform), and the Democrats by omission (many Democrats pay lip service to feminist issues but will use little political muscle to effect changes).

Within both parties are eager feminists, pushing for change. In July 1980, for example, I was working with women on the Republican National Committee to retain the

ERA in the party platform. Mary Dent Crisp, an ardent supporter of the ERA, was co-chair of the committee. Her assistant wrote me: "It is necessary to fight Phyllis Schlafly. She contradicts her own procedural argument of the National Party having no business dictating policy to state legislatures."

This year the National Organization for Women has launched an Election Year Mobilization to pass the new ERA now before Congress. Part of the plan includes turning up the heat on the presidential campaign trail. Robert Dole, who once supported the ERA, this winter dismissed it with the wisecrack, "You want me to win, don't you?" Apparently, withdrawing his support for equality between the sexes did not strengthen his campaign.

George Bush, the likely Republican nominee, was also a supporter of the ERA, but he changed his mind and currently opposes the amendment.



When Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder declined to run, the presidential campaign was left without a major female candidate.

The Democrats in the race support the ERA. But it must be noted that, when we had 35 states which had ratified the ERA and needed only three more to gain ratification, most of the 15 unratified states were controlled by Democrats, who seemed unwilling (in the statehouse world of wheeling and dealing) to make the ERA a priority.

ONE OF THE MYTHS that may keep women out of the presidential race is that women candidates lose more often than men do. In fact, the more women run, the more they win. The percentage of women candidates winning state legislative office ranges from 82 percent in Massachusetts to 27 percent in Nevada, which is a nationwide average of 58 percent. Women won in these races more frequently than men did.

Another myth, too frequently believed, is that feminists and feminism are not popular, and women candidates who are conservative have a better chance of winning. In fact, feminist ideas have more popular support than anti-feminist ideas. In a 1986 Gallup poll for *Newsweek*, 57 percent of the women identified themselves as feminists; only 4 percent identified themselves as anti-feminists. In September 1987 a *Times Mirror* poll conducted by Gallup found that 51 percent of both women and men identify themselves as feminists or at least supporters of the feminist movement.

The Equal Rights Amendment, the right to choose abortion, and reduced military spending—some of the issues on the feminist agenda—continue to have majority support. In addition, most women officeholders today support the ERA, and safe and legal abortion and birth control.

The state and local pipeline is filling with qualified, experienced, and seasoned women. In 1986 three times as many women ran for statewide office as in 1984; nine women ran for governor, 11 for lieutenant governor, and almost 2,000 for state legislature. There were all-female races in 13 congressional districts. Nebraska conducted the first all-female gubernatorial contest, and in Maryland we witnessed the second all-female race for the U.S. Senate. In 1988

the numbers will exceed those in 1986.

We cannot forget that although the first feminist president of the United States was George Washington, (he demanded that Martha Washington be paid for the work she performed as First Lady; she was not) women were not permitted to vote until 1920. The American Medical Association, during the long, painful suffrage struggle, published "scholarly" papers stating that voting would be bad for a woman's health. Some of the Southern states still have not

is as complex as thousands and thousands of years of gender role limitations and expectations. It is as varied as the reasons given by the secular and the religious as to why a woman's place is in the home.

As long as we tell girls and women that their chief function is to be mothers, no matter what else they manage to do on the side, few will aspire to be president of the United States. We still urge women more toward procreation than to creation.

The answer is as cruel as the fact that few professional men are

ings about the "biological clock." The reason no woman is running for president in 1988 surely lies in part with parents, who, while encouraging their daughters and glowing with pride over their achievements and glittering prizes, still ask for grandchildren—urging the beloved daughter to put aside her burning ambitions for domestic pursuits.

The so-called helping professions are also not without responsibility. Dr. Robert Seidenberg has set the stage for a gender-role revolution in the mental health field, which had dictated that boys not compete with girls so "that they might never be exposed to the possibility of being defeated by a female."

In 1973 Seidenberg wrote, in *Corporate Wives—Corporate Casualties?*: "It seems inconceivable that in the future women will be shut out as they have been in the past. The myth of male superiority and supremacy will increasingly disappear for all except the naive or the ruthless. Similarly the rigid sex roles, with their simplistic concepts of masculinity and femininity, will no longer constitute definitions of male and female. For it is human intelligence, not physical force, that runs the world."

Israel, Finland, India, Great Britain—all have been headed by a woman. If the Philippines can be run by a woman, human intelligence suggests that the United States cannot be far behind.

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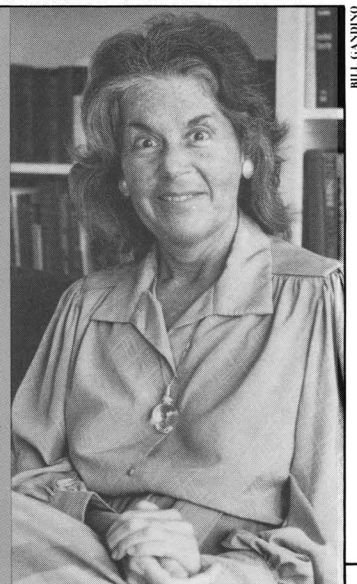
ratified women's suffrage.

After American women got the vote there was not a rush into political office. Those who understand history know that progress does not happen overnight; it takes generations. It was the resurgence of the feminist movement, which had faded after the vote was won, which was needed to promote and facilitate women in politics. The first nationwide conference for this purpose was held in July 1971, when the National Organization for Women sponsored the first School for Women Candidates in Seneca Falls, N.Y. Both the date and the site were chosen to show solidarity and continuity with the First Convention on Women's Rights held there in 1848.

WH Y ARE THERE NO women running for president of the United States in 1988? The answer is this simple: We have not come far enough in the progression of political achievement and fundraising to have the top position. It

asked if they can be serious workers and also fathers, but almost every woman is asked if she can be a professional and a mother too. It is mindless that young women, almost simultaneously with the moment they begin to achieve some small success in their occupational lives, are bombarded with warn-

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