



Clearinghouse on Women's Issues

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Website: www.womensclearinghouse.org

September 2006

Commissions for Women: Useful Today?

Commissions for women — established in the 1970's during the burgeoning women's movement — were inspired by the National Commission on Women, which was headed initially by Eleanor Roosevelt. Their purpose was to function as a bridge between women and governments. These commissions for women are now found at state, county and local levels in many parts of the country; however, support for these efforts is waning.

Our speakers will talk about the current status and priorities of these commissions and they will assess the future relevance and usefulness of such commissions for today's women. **Judith Vaughan-Prather** is executive director of the Montgomery County Government Commission for Women and she also serves as local staff for the National Association of Commissions for Women. She will discuss the national issues as well as the local situation in a county office. **Louise Armitage** serves in a similar directorship for the City of Fairfax Commission for Women. With nineteen years of experience conducting a local program for women, she can provide insight into the viability and survivability of such commissions.

SPEAKERS: **Judith Vaughan-Prather**, Executive Director
Montgomery County Commission for Women

Louise Armitage, Executive Director
City of Fairfax Commission for Women

TOPIC: **Commissions for Women**

DATE/TIME: **Tuesday, September 26, 2006 / 12 noon – 1:30 p.m.**

PLACE: **American Council on Education**
One Dupont Circle, Conference Room B, lower level
(Note change of room location this meeting only.)

Bring brown bag lunch; soft drinks available from a machine

IMPORTANT NOTICE

A photo ID must be shown at the security desk of One Dupont Circle.

Arrive a little early to go through the sign-in system.

Next Meeting: October 24, 2006

PROGRAM SUMMARY – JUNE 27, 2006 MEETING

Candidates and Women's Issues: Making Our Case

The speakers were **Terry O'Neill**, executive director of the National Council of Women's Organizations (NCWO) and **Clare Geisen**, executive director of the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC). A special guest at the meeting was Lois Herr, candidate for the 16th Congressional district in Pennsylvania, who is an excellent example of women in politics.

Terry O'Neill began by stating that general issues for women should be at the top of the political agenda this Fall but actually is not even on the national list. Women are deeply concerned about Social Security and income equality but these concerns are not being talked about in the current militaristic atmosphere of the government. She added that affirmative action, child care and reproductive rights are not on the front burner of most politicians, and are not viewed in the same light as terrorism and military concerns.

O'Neill explained that NCWO brings more than 200 women's groups and organizations together, representing close to ten million women across the United States, to build a consensus on a legislative agenda for the new Congress every two years. NCWO publishes *The ABC's of Women's Issues*, a pamphlet on the key concerns of women and now is preparing the 2006 version. The Council will distribute more than 50,000 copies before the election.

She pointed out that one of the most important issues for women is worry over health care costs: more than 20 percent of women with children have no health insurance. Birth control is a high expense for most young women but health insurance often does not cover these costs, although Viagra for men is usually covered. Older women are concerned about Medicare costs and the war. More than 72 percent of women oppose the war. Lois Herr added that in her discussions with women, the environment and renewable energy resources were also important. The topic of abortion is still a pressure point or volatile issue that

ignites constituent comments on either side of the issue, Geisen commented.

Continuing, Geisen observed that the numbers of women elected to public office are far too low, but are increasing slowly. This November there are nine female challengers for Senate seats, and six incumbents. In the House there are 146 female challengers and for state governors there are 18 women candidates.

In addition, O'Neill declared, research on women's health problems is woefully underfunded. Another problem relates to training and education for women, which leads to good pay and benefits. Better enforcement of the Equal Pay Act is also needed.

Peace is also a major concern of women; resources are diverted from human needs to pay for the war. Roe vs. Wade protections will probably be reduced, as it is already more difficult to obtain a safe abortion today than it was in 1972, a year before the court decision, O'Neill said.

Clare Geisen stated that Lois Herr was one of the first woman candidates endorsed by the National Women's Political Caucus this year. Then she seconded O'Neill's comments that women's issues seem to have disappeared from the political arena, noting that the Republican National Committee's top five items are safety and security; immigration; jobs and education; tax reform; and faith and values. The Democratic Party website had only one link that reflected feminist concerns as well as women's leadership issues.

Geisen declared that current polls show that women are deeply troubled by the uncertainty in the economy. That is their number one issue, followed by health care and care giving, and education.

Both speakers referred to the past week's events when the House tried (and failed) to repeal the estate tax benefit for the wealthy, and voted against increasing the minimum

PROGRAM SUMMARY – JUNE 27, 2006 MEETING continued

Candidates and Women's Issues: Making Our Case

wage which has 51 percent less buying power than when it was introduced. In the same session, members voted themselves a \$30,000 raise. Other items in the question and answer period concerned: the negative effect of outsourcing on women government employees; successful fundraising by Emily's List for female politicians; education, and women's voting — 48 percent of women ages 35-48 voted while only 22 percent of those younger than 35 used their vote in the last presidential election.

In concluding, O'Neill and Geisen reminded all that women have power if they use it and highlighted three concerns for this election period:

- It is urgent to increase the number of women who vote and participate in politics.
- Women can be particularly influential in local elections; they have to ask tough questions and get out the vote.
- It is essential that women use their power to bring about changes that they deem important.

Editor's note:

On the Internet, the National Council of Women's Organizations (NCWO) can be found at <http://www.womensorganizations.org> and the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC) can be found at <http://www.nwpc.org>.

TALIBAN ATTACKS ON GIRLS' SCHOOLS INCREASE

[Update since CWI May 2006 program from the Feminist Majority Democracy-In-Action E-mail dated July 12, 2006.] "Taliban militia bombings, burnings of girls' schools, and the killing of teachers are increasing at an alarming rate as the Taliban resurgence continues to gain strength. Ahmed Rashid, a well known author and expert on the Taliban recently wrote in the *Washington Post* that "...every single day somewhere in Afghanistan a girls' school is burned down or a female teacher is killed by the Taliban." Under the Taliban regime, education for Afghan women and girls was banned.

Human Rights Watch (HRW), has called for the international community and the Afghan government to create a concrete strategy for addressing the security problems. The United Nations (UN) has also repeatedly condemned the attacks. The World Food Program, which provides programs to school children, recently issued a report raising concerns about the increases in threats and attacks on girls' schools.

Eleanor Smeal, President of the Feminist Majority Foundation/Feminist Majority, which has waged a campaign urging the U.S. to increase peacekeeping troops throughout Afghanistan said, "As the bombings and burning of girls' schools continue unabated and the situation for women and girls continues to deteriorate, the Bush Administration remains silent."

Contact your Senators and Representatives today and urge them to support the efforts of Afghan women by co-sponsoring the Afghan Women's Empowerment Act of 2006 S.2392 (introduced by Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and H.R.5185 (introduced by Representative Carolyn Maloney (D-NY)). The Afghan Women's Empowerment Act of 2006 authorizes funding for Afghan institutions that promote and protect women's rights and human rights and for Afghan women-led nonprofits providing direct services to Afghan women and girls."

SENATE APPROVES NATIONAL MAMMOGRAPHY DAY

On July 12, the Senate approved a resolution (S. Res. 508) designating October 20, 2006 as "National Mammography Day."

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Welcome to another "season" of the Clearinghouse on Women's Issues, our thirty-second year! Welcome, also, to our newly elected Board members D. Anne Martin and Jessica Lazar; and warm thanks to outgoing members Jacqueline Scherer and Clara Schiffer for their many contributions. We have exciting programs coming up and always welcome your input and suggestions.

Ellen Overton

HEIDI HARTMANN HONORED

Heidi Hartmann, president of the Institute for Women's Policy Research, has been named a 2006 Purpose Prize Fellow. She received this honor as a semifinalist for the Purpose Prize, which is a new grant initiative aimed at investing in Americans who are over 60 and leading a new age of social innovation. Hartmann was named one of 55 Fellows from a pool of over 1200 applicants. Visit www.leadwithexperience.com to learn more about the Purpose Prize, the Fellows, and Finalists.

Sherry Lansing, chair of The Purpose Prize jury, CEO of the Sherry Lansing Foundation and former chair of Paramount Pictures' Motion Picture Group, said, "Unlike a lifetime achievement award, the Purpose Prize is a critical investment in what these creative individuals will do next to solve important problems. As Bill Gates said, "It's not about retiring, it's about reordering your priorities." Two foundations, the Atlantic Philanthropies and The John Templeton Foundation, provided funding to Civic Ventures for the Prize.

AAUW URGES ACTION TO OPPOSE BILLS IN CONGRESS

[From AAUW Action Network E-newsletter August 2006] With back- to- school season upon us again, AAUW asks us to take a moment to write to our members of Congress to urge them to oppose the America's Opportunity Scholarships for Kids Act (S3682/HR5822) which may threaten the vitality of public schools in your area.

If passed, the Act would divert already scarce financial resources away from public schools through private school vouchers, misleadingly named "opportunity scholarships." Voucher schemes like those proposed in S3682/HR5822 subsidize tuition at private or religious schools with federal dollars, draining millions of taxpayer dollars from the public schools that educate 90 percent of the nation's students.

The E-newsletter states, "While AAUW supports innovative techniques to improve America's schools, we believe this new proposal flies in the face of our nation's commitment to public education in addition to the flexibility and accountability mandated by No Child Left Behind (NCLB). AAUW believes the appropriate strategy for improving our nation's schools is to direct resources toward improving public schools, rather than diverting public funds into private institutions.

AAUW urges Congress to oppose this and any new attempt to divert public dollars into a private school voucher scheme. Vouchers are taxpayers' dollars spent according to the policies of a private school board—not the decisions of a democratically elected and publicly accessible school board. Because private schools are not accountable to the public at large, taxpayers lose public oversight for the expenditure of their tax dollars. Better funding for public schools is a priority now more than ever, as schools struggle to meet mandated accountability standards and address achievement gaps among students according to a NCLB program that is under funded by more than \$40 billion."

CELEBRATE PBS' "TO THE CONTRARY"
Bonnie Erbé's 15th Season on Public Television

The Congressional Caucus on Women's Issues invites you to a FREE reception on **Wednesday, September 20, 2006 from 6:00 p.m. – 8 p.m., Cannon House Office Bldg., Cannon Caucus Room.** The event marks 15 years of progress for women in media and politics. (Bonnie Erbé spoke to CWI on this subject earlier this year.) Awards, sponsored by Toyota and FedEx, will be presented to Women's Policy Inc. and to Dr. Bernadine Healey, US News and World Report, and former director, National Institutes of Health. Women's Caucus Co-Chairs are Representatives Ginny Brown-Waite (R-FL.) and Hilda Soilis (D-CA.) and Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC). **RSVP to jfowlin@tothecontrary.org.**

NATIONAL WOMEN'S LAW CENTER ANNUAL AWARDS DINNER OCT. 19

This dinner event will take place starting 6 p.m. at the Washington Hilton Towers. Charlie Rose, host of the Charlie Rose Show, is the special guest, and author Judy Blume will be honored for her writings "that speak to the issues children, young adults and parents grapple with every day and for her work as founder and trustee of The Kids Fund, an educational foundation. Individual ticket price \$250. Reservations can be made on line at <http://www.nwlc.org>. For more information call 202 588-5180.

PLANNING AHEAD 2007: MARCH 26-27

The National Council of Women's Organizations (NCWO) and the Younger Women's Task Force (YWTF) are proud to announce the Women's Equality Summit and Congressional Action Day, March 26th and 27th, 2007. NCWO says it has never been more urgent for women to shape the policies that affect their lives.

NCWO & YWTF are jointly hosting this exciting 2-day gathering in Washington, DC. They expect hundreds of women leaders of all ages from across the nation to come together to deliver a unified message to policy makers on Capitol Hill.

BEST BARGAIN IN TOWN: RENEW NOW

Individual dues: \$25.00 or \$35.00 for organizations. We have made renewal easier by having one date for everyone. Regardless of when you renewed in the past, dues are now payable in September to maintain your membership from September 06 to August 07.

The Clearinghouse on Women's Issues (CWI) presents expert speakers nine times during the year on current topics which impact the lives of women.

Send Renewal to: CWI
 Linda Fihelly, Treasurer
 5618 N. Marwood Blvd.
 Upper Marlboro, MD 20772

CWI NEWSLETTER NOW AVAILABLE VIA E-MAIL: Members wishing to receive the CWI Newsletter via email instead of U.S. mail can send their e-mail requests to cwinwsltr@aol.com

COMING EVENTS

SEPTEMBER CWI MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL MONTH for individuals and organizations. See page 5.

SEPT. 20 RECEPTION CELEBRATING PBS' "TO THE CONTRARY." See page 5.

SEPT. 26 CWI Meeting, One Dupont Circle, NW, Conf. Rm. B, lower level. 12 n - 1:30pm
Topic: Commissions for Women: Useful Today? See page 1.

OCTOBER Domestic Violence Awareness Month

OCT. 19 National Women's Law Center Annual Awards Dinner. See page 5.

OCT. 24 CWI Meeting, One Dupont Circle, NW, 8th Floor, 12 noon - 1:30pm

Future CWI Program Year 2006-7 Meetings - MARK YOUR CALENDARS

2006: September 26; October 24; November 28; (No December meeting)

2007: January 23; February 27; March 27; April 24; May 22; June 26

CWI Board of Directors, July 2006 – June 2007. OFFICERS: President, Ellen S. Overton; Vice President Program, Sue Klein; Vice President Membership, Jean Landweber; Treasurer, Linda Fihelly; Secretary, Harriett M. Stonehill. BOARD MEMBERS: Alvin Golub, Harriett Harper, Roslyn Kaiser, Jessica Lazar, D. Anne Martin, Ruth G. Nadel, Joy R. Simonson, ex officio.

Sheila A. Willet, Newsletter Editor

CWI

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FIRST CLASS MAIL