

The Status of Women in SWPA

Remarks by Dr. Esther Barazzone, President of Chatham College
National Council of Jewish Women, Pittsburgh Section
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Good evening and thank you for allowing me this opportunity to be a part of NCJW's efforts on behalf of Pittsburgh women. Special thanks to Cindy Busis, Judy Cohen, and the Executive Committee for inviting me to be a part of this wonderful evening. As always it is a pleasure to see Leslie Stiles and hear about the ongoing work of the Pennsylvania Commission for Women.

This is a topic about which I have always cared greatly. However, it assumed urgent importance in my mind in connection with some work I did in 2002 for the Allegheny Conference. Not intending, for once, to focus on the topic of women, I went to work with a good set of task force colleagues on the issue of why young people are leaving the region. It did not take long before this complicated issue emerged with a few clear components and one in particular which is very important to our conversation tonight— that the lack of real diversity in leadership, or opportunities for leadership, mattered enormously to the young people in the region. They SAW the same things that we had - and it was driving them away. The facts that came out as we did our reading for the task force stunned even me - who was already prepared to see the glass as half empty where the status of women is concerned.

We in the task force all learned a great deal from the work from the work of Susan Hansen and Ralph Bangs at the University of Pittsburgh. We learned from them and others that while the status of women in the state is far from ideal, it is far worse in the 11 counties of Southwest Pennsylvania. We believed we had found an extreme situation that needed to be reported, monitored in an ongoing way, and be the subject of intensive committed actions dedicated to change. We at Chatham in turn really felt that we had an obligation to take what we had learned and do something with this dramatic information.

Thanks to Elsie Hillman, the conscience and leader of us all, Chatham College already had a place to start this project – our statewide Pennsylvania Center for Women, Politics, and Public Policy ably headed by Dr. Allyson Lowe and before her, your own Cindy Busis. The Center's mission is to improve the participation of women in public leadership throughout the Commonwealth. To that mission we added in 2002 a commitment to public policy and, in 2005, established the "Regional Women's Initiative," dedicated explicitly to advancing the status of women in Southwest Pennsylvania. Thus, RWI was born and has as its tasks to increase public awareness of gender disparity in the region, and provide the education and training needed to challenge and change the status quo.

In deciding to focus on the region, we felt it was very important not to let Allegheny County stand for the region. So we made a commitment to get the information, county by county, on the status of women in our region, on a broad base of indicators and then later begin our education and organization.

We were very fortunate to recruit Kristin DeLuca to Chatham to direct the RWI. Kristin came to us as an experienced political organizer of numerous campaigns - including a presidential primary & general election, and 2 targeted congressional races with women candidates - and is a woman with a passionate commitment to women and their success. Another quality Kristin has, like any good political organizer, is the desire and ability to collaborate, understanding that it is the way to create broad movements for change. And we were happy to find partners who were also distressed by the regional trends and ready to act.

We have been very much in good cahoots with the Women and Girls Foundation of SWPA, its Executive Director Heather Arnet, and Dr. Patricia Ulbrich, founding Chair of the WGF Board and now a visiting scholar at the University of Pittsburgh.

We were blessed that Dr. Ulbrich had initiated research on the region two years ago. Dr. Ulbrich, working with Kristin, focused the research on our region and compiled comparable data with the rest of the state and the nation using the same methodology as the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) in their *Status of Women in the States* series.

This evening, we are thrilled to share with you the first fruit of this major project –you are the first to have in your hands this report that will soon be distributed to women throughout the region – “The Status of Women in Southwest Pennsylvania.” [see regional overview at: www.chatham.edu/RWI]

When this wonderful series is done, there will be a fact sheet for each of the 11 counties as well as the overview - it should motivate and empower the region's women to advocate effectively for change. Numbers are the bottom line. The numbers in this report say we had better get an improved bottom line, or be real losers. That we have a great deal to do to achieve equity will come as no surprise, but the particulars may.

FINDINGS

From political representation, to education, to pay equity, to leadership roles, women in our region are waging an uphill battle. You have just heard some statewide numbers from Leslie Stiles, but they bear repeating, to cast light on the region's relatively worse situation. Pennsylvania is:

- ❖ 47th in the nation for women's Political Participation & Representation
- ❖ 36th in women's Employment & Earnings
- ❖ 29th in women's Social & Economic Autonomy

In fact, Pennsylvania does not rank above 29th in the nation on any of the Institute for Women's Policy Research indicators.

Now let's look at our region's 11 counties. Southwest Pennsylvania has numbers that are worse than the state's numbers in everything and Pittsburgh is worse than most of the nation's 50 largest MSAs (Metropolitan Statistical Areas.)

Let's look at the WAGE GAP:

- ❖ Women account for 52% of the population, outnumbering men in the workforce. Statewide, women earn 72% what men do... but we are 5% lower in this region...making only 67% of men's earnings.
- ❖ Every county in SWPA has a wage gap larger than the statewide average. Butler County has the largest wage gap in the region with women earning only 64% of what men earn, or 8% lower than the state average. Women in Allegheny County benefit from living in the region's economic center and earn 71% of each \$1.00 a man earns...still below the state average and far from ideal.

Now let's look at the percentage of women in the labor force who are employed in professional or managerial occupations. Again, the news is not good. Statewide, a little over 1/3 of women in the labor force work in managerial positions. And in 9 of 11 counties in our region, the percentage of women in those occupations is below the state average.

How about women-owned business? Once again, we fall behind here. Entrepreneurship is the source of real wealth creation. There are 3 new women owned businesses to every one by a man that are being created, nationally. But here, too, the number of women entrepreneurs lags behind other regions, as does the rate of growth of their business creation and the growth in the size of those businesses. For this reason, we started the Chatham College Center for Entrepreneurship to augment another key area for women and the region's earnings future!

Now let's look at education for a moment – by examining college degree earners. First, let me tell you why this is important. College graduates in PA earn, on the whole, more than double (109%) what high school graduates earn. If you consider the wage gap between women and men, think about what female high school graduates make.

What came as a true surprise to me was the percentage of women for whom a bachelor's degree is the highest degree earned. Guess? 10, 20, 30? Statewide, the average for 4 year degree earning by women is only 13%, at the time of the study. Maybe now 16% for women and men. Parenthetically, this is a huge problem for Pennsylvania as a whole – the national average is 18% for men and women -- and an increase in the number of PA college graduates overall is something the governor should take on as a major policy challenge with particular focus on women. The governor of Michigan has just declared as the highest priority for the state trying to move away from heavy automotive industry. The goal is to double the number of people receiving college degrees in Michigan from 15% to 30 %.

So in education, statewide: 13 % of our women get a 4 year degree. Shockingly, again, 9 of 11 counties in SWPA fall below the state average of women with bachelor's degrees. And that is here, with so many higher education institutions in this region. There is a little good news -- Allegheny and Butler counties exceed both the regional AND state averages on this measure, coming in around 15%.

College educated women can act to counter their economic discrimination, and they do. According to Susan Hansen, the greatest out-migration of college educated people in the Commonwealth, is women. Get this! If executive men leave SWPA, there is around a 30% chance they will make more than \$50,000 – if women leave, the chance is nearly 60% that they will make more than \$50,000 in a new job!!

You won't be surprised to know that political representation is an indicator on which women do not fare well in SWPA. Nationally we rank 47th as a state for women's political participation and representation. This statewide practice is reflected in local practice. I think that a good part of the ire and organizational effort on women's issues recently sprang from the disgust over no women being on the Oversight Board for Pittsburgh when it was created.

We also have the distinction of being the only state in which women are less likely to register to vote than men – and we can change this! Statewide, a mere 14% of the legislature is women and no woman has EVER been elected governor. There are no female U.S. Senators from Pennsylvania, and only 2 members of our 21 member congressional delegation have two X chromosomes. At a more local level, Twanda Carlisle is the only woman on the 9-member Pittsburgh City Council. In fact, the 1st woman was elected to city council in 1956 and very few have been elected since. In contrast, 5 of the 11 members of the Philadelphia City Council are women -- 45%!

Elected commissioners are the main metric of political representation at the county level. Statewide, women comprise just 26% of county commissioners. But, in SWPA, 5 of our 11 counties - Beaver, Butler, Indiana, Lawrence and Westmoreland - have NO female county commissioners at all.

Now let's talk briefly about women on Boards, a ticklish subject because it brings up issues of race in comparison to gender. When we did the Conference Report, it was difficult to get gender on the table as an issue because diversity in this region has been reduced to issues of race. Mention women's lagging status and you will quickly be dismissed with a patronizing "yes, and we must pay attention to African Americans too." Yes, we must, but women have been making fewer advances in leadership positions than have African Americans in recent years. A CMU study for the Women and Girls Foundation made this point well, women are over 50% of the working age population in Allegheny County, and have 29% of the board and commission committee seats, while African Americans, with 12% of the county's working population now have 22 % of board and commission seats. We need to support the Women and Girl's Foundation project: "Pennsylvanians for Fair Representation" as they work to ensure that our boards and commissions are truly reflective of our population. We hope the governor will make some high level Commission appointments of women from SWPA.

Now to look at paid corporate boards: When the Conference, with the Urban League, created a project a few years back out of concern for African Americans on corporate Boards, 4 African American males went on 5 Boards – no women. In 2002 the Post Gazette surveyed 52 publicly held local companies- 47 responded. They have more than 400 seats and women hold 7.8%; minorities 6.8% well below the state average of 11% and national average of 12.4%.

As our last point of discussion, we turn to county commissions for women: only two counties in the region - Mercer and Westmoreland - have active women's commissions. Across the state, 12 out of 67 counties have such commissions. We should call on County Executive Dan Onorato to create a commission in Allegheny County and encourage the same in each of our 11 counties. Sometimes it may be frustrating to find results of such commissions, but we have observed that the two counties with the highest percentage of female county commissioners also have comparatively better access to resources and active women's advocacy organizations.

The point should have been made clear. By now: things are different and worse in our region and we MUST do better, if we are to compete within our own national marketplace, let alone an international arena.

What are the next steps? First, we are trying to turn research and investigation into education and organization! This fall Chatham College's RWI and the Women & Girls Foundation, will travel throughout the region on a Road to Equity Tour, to discuss the findings, create awareness of existing funding opportunities and upcoming skills trainings, and discuss how this report can best be used as a tool for advocacy and what women want to do. Also, the Regional Women's Initiative will be home to a virtual women's center where the entire series AND additional in-depth and up to date research on the status of women in each county and the region can be accessed, and women and women's groups can be in contact.

On January 27 and 28 an Advocacy Training will be offered through Chatham's Pennsylvania Center for Women, Politics and Public Policy. We promise intense and interactive training that will strength the advocacy skills of even the most experienced community activists in the room.

Finally, we want to join you and others in creating a network, to act with you and your traditionally committed and capable leadership both as an organization and as individuals. Let's join together and become a catalyst in moving our region forward and change for the better many of those statistics I mentioned earlier.

Thank you again for inviting me to be part of this evening.