

Where are the Women Issues of Importance to the Women of ND

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Tonight I want to talk to you about a concern that is very dear to my heart. For years I have seen male dominated leadership in my town, county and state. The city council is all male, the county commission is all male, the telephone board is all male and the list goes on and on.
(Optional - Insert your reasons why this topic is important to you)

So..... **(Click for Title)** Where are the Women?

“Where are the Women” is a white paper that was written by Linda Wurth for the ND Women’s Network.

(Slide Two - Click)

Linda, the author, became involved with a group of highly educated, experienced, reputable women that called themselves, “The Fargo Think Tank” and “Stepping Forward.” This group initially wanted to get more women involved in leadership. Their solution was to just offer their help to find qualified women candidates for openings on state boards and commissions. But how? Their polite inquiry to the governor’s office yielded a polite “the way we do things currently works well.”

They needed a new tactic. “Where Are the Women” was commissioned by the ND Women’s Network as a resource to plead why women are needed. It demonstrates the value women bring to the leadership of corporations, organizations, and government. Research shows that gender balance is about more than women’s rights, it affects performance and profitability.

Tonight this program will share with you some local statistics, and some information on the importance of having women involved in leadership as well as the barriers and some recommendations for change.

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North Dakota was a national leader when it elected the first women to a state office in 1893. Since then North Dakotans have voted just 17 women into statewide office.

Slide 4 - (Click)

This is the first year that we have had three women in statewide office in the history of the state. Kelly Schmidt was reelected as State Treasurer in 2013 and two women were newly elected in 2013. Kirsten Baesler as Supt. Of Public Instruction and Julie Fedorchak on the Public Service Commission.

Slide 5 - (Click)

ND Women have only recently gained in the state legislature. This year we moved from a state ranking of 45th in the nation to 41st Progress is slowly being made.

Slide 6 – (Click)

As you can see by the slide. This year, we made a slight gain in women senators and representatives, each increasing by one. This year we just elected our first women from North Dakota to the US Congress, Senator Heidi Heitkamp. Mrs. Burdick was appointed, not elected, after the death of her husband.

Slide 7 – (Click)

In 2010, 315 women ran for public office, seeking positions in statewide offices, the legislature, counties and cities. In 2012 that number increased to 463.

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But despite the increase in the numbers of women running for an office, women still make up only 17% of our total state legislative body.

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Though several women's groups, including AAUW and the ND Women's Network, relentlessly seek equality and women certainly deserve equal opportunities, there are practical, strategic and socially beneficial reasons for bringing women onto the leadership team. Tonight my goal is to give you some insight into why more women are needed.

Slide 10 - (Click)

In study after study, women are found to bring more innovation, have broader leadership skills, and bring strong character traits to the board room and executive offices. A women's approach to legislating is often closer to her constituency, developed through collaboration, and negotiated with more transparency.

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There is not a study of gender balance on corporate boards in ND. But an analysis of our state government boards and commissions gives us a picture of how ND state government is doing in leading us toward

gender equity. Although statute and executive order often outline the qualifications and parameters for board membership, gender was **not found** to be an equal factor.

Slide 12 - (Click)

So even though we have a statute, there is no transparent process in place to meet this requirement.

Slide 13 – (Click)

In fact there were 23 entities listed that have no women members. It is difficult to believe that there are no qualified women in North Dakota who would be willing to serve on the Oil and Gas Research Council (10 members), the State Water Pollution Control Board (13 members) or the Lignite Research Council (26 members), to name just three.

Slide 14 – (Click)

As a strictly subjective exercise, boards were sorted by female identified, male identified, and non-identified. Female identified boards included the North Dakota Council on the Arts, State Board of Cosmetology, and North Dakota Humanities Council, boards that could be identified with typically stereotyped women's issues.

Male identified boards included State Electrical Board, Pardon Advisory Board, and the Administrative Committee on Veterans Affairs, boards that would be stereotyped as male.

This sorting yielded 28 female identified boards with 64% women. Eighty boards are male identified with just 20% female membership. Thirty-four boards could not be gender identified, and had 38% women. Although this sorting is clearly not objective research, it suggests that

the difficulty in reaching gender parity may lie in reaching out to women in nontraditional fields.

Slide 15 - (Click)

There are benefits for women serving on boards, commissions, councils and task forces. **(Click)** Benefits commonly known include the people one gets to know and the ability to network with them. **(Click)** A second benefit is that you are first to see emerging issues and to learn of the perceptions and positions around those issues. **(Click)** The third benefit is you become familiar with the practice of resolving issues. All this is experience you can bring to other boards, your job and perhaps even elected office. **(Click)** Women who sit on boards have the advantage of being visible in both the public and private sector. The decision-makers and influencers get to know them and learn to trust them. They build credibility. **(Click)** And last seeing more women in the board room, more women in management, and more women in public office would change the paradigm for young women. A great role model for our upcoming young women.

Slide 16 - (Click)

There are many barriers perceived by women as barriers to being leaders. **(Click)** One barrier is that some leadership positions are typically “attributed” to be male fields of interest. **(Click)** 2nd is the barrier of balancing the roles as mother and primary caregivers with work responsibilities. **(Click)** The third barrier is one in which employee’s/board members are expected to have unlimited availability and be ready to travel or move if necessary. **(Click)** The fourth is that many women are a barrier to themselves by not speaking up. They need mentors who will advocate for their next promotion and speak of their strengths and plead the case for advancement. **(Click)** The fifth barrier is that there are few role models that model success and equity.

Slide 17 - (Click)

We can help women overcome some of the barriers to serving by making some changes. **(Click)** We need to change the culture of the workplace to be more supportive of families and caregivers. **(Click)** We need to hold our government accountable for the gender balance statute and possibly even put more teeth into the statute. **(Click)** We can mentor and encourage women to seek opportunities that will allow them to serve. **(Click)** We need to revitalize the Commission on the Status of Women. This commission has been inactive since 2008.

In conclusion, there is a wealth of talented, skilled, extraordinary women in North Dakota, and our corporate, political, and social culture is denying us the benefit of their expertise.

Slide 18 – (Click)

A copy of the full report “Where Are the Women” is available for download on the ND Women’s Network website at:

<http://ndwomen.org>

(Slide 19 - Click)

In 1893 we were a leader in our nation for women. We need to move forward and become that leader again.

(Slide 20 – Click)

A note from Linda Wurtz

(Slide 21 – Click)

Discussion:

Action Ideas To Discuss and/or Act On (*Optional*) Pick one or more to have your group discuss and possibly develop a branch plan of action.

#1...create and monitor gender diversity indicators...that means the top brass will know at all times the gender balance of the company they run. It would be a part of keeping track of advancement, one of the factors in measuring infrastructure, and preparedness for the future.

#2: Requiring at least one woman on every short list for promotion, appointment, or hiring. If gender balance is important to the future of your company or your state...then isn't it just good business to always see that the decision-makers have a woman on their short list? It would begin to dispel the myth of what is "women's work" and what is "men's work." It would begin to override the "think-leader-think-male" default that is embedded in our culture.

#3: Changing the career advice given to students in secondary schools. In 2010 the North Dakota Women's Network released a report entitled "Junior and Senior High School Girls in North Dakota: Assessing Their Aspirations and Challenges." In that report Dr. Slobin analyzed focus groups of urban and rural junior and senior high school girls. When discussing their hopes for a career path, they discussed such things as the lack of gender equity education in their schools, the prevalence of gender stereotypes, hiring bias, discriminatory wages, and as women...not being taken seriously in the job market. Remember these are junior and senior high school girls. One of the things I found inspiring in that research is...our kids are not stupid. They are watching...and this is the world they see. And so a recommendation to leaders in secondary education... to ensure that career advice is gender neutral...seems academic. Our young people...male and female...need to grow up learning there aren't "men's jobs" and "women's jobs."

Changing our approach to career counseling in secondary schools would be a beginning...it would give young women hope that those non-traditional careers are attainable. They should not have to lower their expectations in order to be assured a paycheck in our society...and it just makes good business sense to start preparing women for the board room and the executive offices as part of their secondary education.

#4: Make our mentorship programs into sponsorship programs... According to Sylvia Ann Hewlett, founding president of the Center for Work-Life Policy, women need more than mentors...they need sponsors. A sponsor is someone who will not just advise and direct you in your career...but will also advocate for you. When that next promotion comes up, your sponsor should personally speak to your strengths and make the case for your advancement. That is what happens in the gentlemen's world of business. If gender-balance is good business, then women should also have sponsors. Those sponsors

should be looking for talent, ability, initiative...and then put their reputation on the line to promote that talent because it's good for business...or it's good governance.

#5: Changing the model of family responsibilities to encourage greater balance at home. For years we have been commenting on family responsibilities as a barrier to women who want a career. Women have more of the child care responsibilities, more of the burden of aging parents, more of the cleaning, more of the trips to Target, more of the cooking, more of the holiday organizing. Now, I have to admit this is changing. Some of my younger, married friends have spouses who actually cook...many are great parents. But wouldn't it be great, if corporate America decided it would be good for business to change that culture? And indeed, if corporate America wants to take advantage of a woman's talent, knowledge, management skills, etc...then they should make sure that she has the support at home to allow her to give them the benefit of her employment. It just makes good business sense.

#6: Include gender-diversity indicators as part of management performance reviews. Now imagine if your supervisor was rated on a series of indicators that measured gender-diversity in their department every time he or SHE was brought up for review. What is consistently implied or openly stated throughout the research on this topic is that top management has to be engaged. A change like this would indicate that top management is not just engaged but committed. Making gender-diversity an indicator of their management success could change the culture of the entire business. The think-leader-think-male default...gone. Supervisors would comply with setting gender-diversity business targets...and then work to achieve those targets. When supervisors performed evaluations of their direct reports...evaluation language, questions, and feedback would all become more gender neutral. Talent management systems would become more gender neutral. If there is a lack of women represented in a particular department, perhaps they've been asking the wrong questions, seeking the wrong qualifications, offering the wrong benefit package.

Statistics show that the preference and promotion of men over women is largely unconscious. That means we can't wait for the market to correct the gender imbalance. We must be intentional to ensure that gender discrimination does not have a negative effect on our business community or on our government. So changing this aspect of performance reviews is not out of bounds. Remember, it's no longer about equality or what's right, it's about good business. The argument that a good manager takes the most qualified applicant over the gender of the applicant is no longer definitive. That doesn't mean business needs to settle for unqualified applicants...it just means that if there doesn't seem to be enough qualified women....then they should either redefine the qualifications needed...or find ways to train the women they need. Gender-diversity indicators are necessary if you're going to change the culture and make your business the best it can be.

#7 Recruiters should also ask for the help of women's groups. It was short-sighted of our governor's office to reject the help of the North Dakota Women's Network. Women's groups are changing. We are networks of educated, well-trained, articulate, experienced women. We can be a resource for companies seeking the right woman to add to their board of directors, the perfect applicant for the next position opening. Businesses should be collaborating with women's groups to change the marketplace

for employees, change the environment for women seeking careers, and change the mind-set of business leaders.

#8 We should strengthen NDCC 54-06-19 regarding the gender balance on boards and commissions. If, indeed, someone would wish to abide by the law...it would be helpful to provide on the boards and commission website the gender balance of the group “from which the appointments are made,” and the gender balance of the commission as it stands. That would make it easier for promising applicants to know what the gender balance is currently, and what it should be...if one were interested in applying for a position...or interested in following statute. We should also strengthen the “to the extent possible” phrasing.

#9 It would also benefit the gender balance of our state to make the Commission on the Status of Women more effective. One of the original charges for the Commission was to “assist in bringing women into full partnership in the life of our state.” A commission that rarely meets, doesn’t keep minutes, and is only charged with “economics and education issues for women” is too limited in scope to accomplish that goal. We should broaden the scope, bring the commission back to life with at least quarterly meetings, and provide an agenda that would stimulate its members. Or, we should find another mechanism to move the leadership of women forward in our state.