

The Scholar And The Feminist XIX
Saturday, April 24, 1993

Afternoon Panel

1. Power for Women in Cities

Prof. Ester Fuchs, Barnard College: As a teacher of urban politics, it is very exciting for me to have these four illustrious women here today. I think we're very fortunate.

Let me start by quickly addressing a question that my students ask me all the time: What difference will it make if we elect women to public office or if we appoint women to public positions? After all, won't they just pursue the same policies as men? Won't they be up against the same barriers as male public officials?

There is some data that goes to the heart of the matter of why we need more women in elected and appointed offices. It turns out that when women are elected to public office they tend to have a different political agenda than most men. Some will say, "Women care about the soft issues." But, they are not the "soft issues," they are **the** issues that all of America cares about. It's not an accident that we elected more women to public office in 1992. We are now confronting issues in the domestic arena; issues that women have spoken to even before they were powerless to make the changes. And we're talking not just about issues in social welfare policy, but issues of family, issues of work, issues of teenage pregnancy, issues of healthcare, issues of war and peace, with the emphasis on the peace and not the war. This is the difference women in public office can make.

There are some fascinating studies about women administrators, women who have been appointed to public office, that indicate that women have different administrative styles than men. This may change over time, but right now they tend to have different styles. And, in my view, different means better in this context. They tend to be less confrontational, they tend to work better with groups, they tend to bring in the so-called disenfranchised people and make them feel like they can have an impact on the system, and they tend to be more efficient in terms of getting their work done as compared to men, believe it or not, and maybe that's because so many women are balancing home and workplace so their time can't be wasted the same way many men waste their time. So in closing let me say yes, it makes a difference to have women elected and to have women appointed. And I think our panelists will certainly confirm this.

Let me briefly introduce the panel to you. We'll begin with Mayor Perry and then go on to Commissioner Sanchez, Borough President Messinger, and City Council Member Eldridge.

It's a special treat for me to introduce Mayor Carrie Saxon Perry. I have had the pleasure of hearing her speak once before so I know she won't disappoint. She's an extraordinary woman. She was elected Mayor of Hartford, Connecticut for the first time in 1987. She is now serving her third term. She is the first African American woman to be elected mayor of a major city in the United States, no mean feat. Prior to 1987 she served in the General Assembly of Connecticut where she was an assistant majority leader. She's a long time community activist, a real grassroots person. Mayor Perry is a social worker by training and has championed issues of affordable housing, daycare, job training, and international human rights.

Digna Sanchez is the Assistant Commissioner for Policy and Program Development in the New York City Development Agency. She has worked in social services from a community-oriented perspective. She is what I consider the classic woman administrator: diligently working to involve people in the process of distributing the Community Development Agency's resources so that the CDA is in touch with the real needs of the community. Ms. Sanchez has developed some very interesting new programs there, and has been a very effective and innovative administrator.

On my left is Ruth Messinger, the Borough President of Manhattan. Ms. Messinger is not a stranger to Morningside Heights or to Barnard. Before becoming Borough President she was a member of the City Council. She's an extraordinary woman. Despite the fact that the Borough Presidency is formally not very powerful Ruth Messinger has managed to create a voice at the Borough level and has been an example to the other Borough presidents. Welcome back to Barnard.

And now for another familiar face: I'd like to introduce City Council member Ronnie Eldridge. She has been an activist in city politics and in state politics since John Lindsay's administration. For years she has been working to empower New York City's women and minorities. Ms. Eldridge worked as the director of the Division for Women under Governor Cuomo, and then decided to run for elected office. I don't know what possessed her to do that. Being a good politician is one of the hardest jobs in the world. New York City is lucky to have Ronnie Eldridge in the City Council, championing the causes that we all care about, and we are lucky to have you here today.

Thank you all very much for coming. Why don't we begin with Mayor Perry:

Carrie Saxon Perry, Mayor, Hartford, CT: I want to say good afternoon to everyone. It's been a great day so far. It seems that I'm the only non-New Yorker up here. So am I safe?

Sometimes my friends in the academic community say that I really don't know how rough-and-tumble politics is until I've been on a campus. That I'll see some *real*

politics then. In July 1992, when I received the invitation to participate in today's panel I was in the middle of a coup. The Hartford City Council was plotting for my overthrow. I'm happy to say that I'm still mayor, and I'm happy to be here, too.

But that's the nature of the political beast. When I ran the last time, I thought that my previous council was not respecting the mayor's office. So on the night of the endorsement for candidates, both mayor and council, they disrespected me one last time. I had asked for something very simple: I asked if I could be fifth on the agenda rather than first because I wanted to do some negotiating over our relationship for the next session. They said, "Absolutely not." So I just walked out of the convention and went to a bar. Half of the convention, unbeknownst to me, followed me. Because of that walking out I was endorsed late. I ran for mayor with a totally unknown sixth slate and, of course, the odds were totally against all of us winning, but we all did.

We thought we had thrown the rascals out! For 8 months the new rascals were okay. Then, as a result of small character traits like megalomania and things of that sort, they decided to try to diminish my authority and responsibility. So in the midst of all of this -- this is all happening in July of 1992 -- so in the midst of this I get this letter from Barnard talking about women and the challenges of the city and how to win. So I said, "The time is right. So if all works well, yes, I will try to be there." So here I am and there are still some difficulties, but these are some of the things I'll be talking about.

Indulge me a little bit as I just wander back in history. I think we always need to build on what has come before us in terms of our relationship as women in power to power. For all of us as women the struggle has been awesome. I marvel at the legacy of Black women in the history of this land. It is a bittersweet chronicle of the skills of survival, skills that enabled strong-willed women to survive the inhumanities of slavery. Black women had to develop skills to survive in a world that told the young and the gifted Black women that their highest aspirations were limited to work in kitchens, nurseries, and the field.

There is another bit of history I want to share with you about the Grimke sisters who, in the 1830s, were working to end slavery. Around 1837 they found themselves in the center of a whole new and different controversy. Angelina Grimke remarked, "We are placed very unexpectedly in a very trying situation in the forefront of an entirely new contest. A contest for the rights of woman as a moral, intelligent, and responsible being."

And then, just a little folklore to end my history trip, that according to one of our local newspapers it was a woman by the name of Barber who was the first settler to step on Connecticut soil. She is said to have jumped ashore while two men were arguing about which one of them would be the first. However, when she got to Connecticut she had few rights. With these pieces of history in mind let's talk about what lies ahead for women in the future.

Are certain changes irreversible? Will we have more women in the U.S. Congress, more women governors, more mayors? Will there ever be a woman president? I don't see any hands going up. Our current statistics, though higher than ever before, are abysmal when you consider the ratio of women in our country to the women who serve, but I think the changes we have seen are irreversible. And to just talk one more thing about the coup. I sent a letter to Yeltsin. I said to him, "I have empathy for your situation. And if you ever want to commiserate, please come to Hartford to see me." More women will be mayors. More women will have power. More women will be in the forefront of the fight for justice and equality.

And this brings me to my second point: I am honored to be the Mayor of Hartford, but my honor comes with an enormous responsibility because though Connecticut is the wealthiest state in the nation, Hartford is the eighth poorest city. I see that as unacceptable. In the wealthiest state in the nation the largest employers -- insurance companies, jet engine makers, banks -- are laying off people in record numbers. That is also unacceptable. In the wealthiest state of the nation the capital city, Hartford, has an infant mortality rate closer to Bangladesh than to the suburbs. That is unacceptable. While irreversible changes have created the conditions that launched my political career, I have to step up to the responsibility of these changes. It is not enough to count how many women mayors. It is not enough to count how many Black or white faces. To further the changes that have made my career possible I have to constantly fight for equality and justice.

In Hartford, Prospect Avenue separates the city from its suburb, West Hartford. On one side of the street school children succeed. They read on grade level. Their test scores track with national and state averages. On the other side of the street school children fail. They cannot read grade level. They are locked in schools that are segregated by race and by class. They are locked in schools that are chronically underfunded, under-supplied, and under-serviced. Recently the final brief in an important case has gone to the courts. We are now waiting on the verdict in *Sheff v. O'Neill* which will hopefully compel the State of Connecticut to admit that it is responsible not only for the education, the traditional education, of the children in its school system, but that it is responsible for what causes them to be unable to perform. Connecticut must look at the social conditions of our cities, at how obscene it is that Hartford has the major concentration of the poor, and that three Connecticut cities probably have 90 percent of the minority children. So wish us well on the suit. If we succeed it will be a landmark case, and other states in the country are looking at it. And it is very, very important because it says that we, as a nation, have more than a responsibility to just teach reading, writing, and arithmetic: we have a responsibility to prepare young people to have an even start at the gate.

If I am to accept the changes that give me the opportunity to run for office and win, then I have to accept the responsibility for ending these inequities. It's not enough to step up and achieve without giving back. That's a critical lesson that we, as women, have to remember. As women, we were locked out. As women, we were denied. As

women, we are still discriminated against. As women, our style of leadership, our responsibility, requires a commitment to change, a commitment to equality. Equality for us as women requires equality for all. Let's never forget that.

I was just given a gift of a book by Johnnetta Cole [President of Spelman College in Atlanta] called Conversation and it's excellent. In it she said, "Injustice has a way of beckoning us to take corrective action which may require sacrifices that people generally do not wish to make. Those who are in power want to maintain the status quo, and who would forge for us new chains to bind us." So we have to be ever, ever alert.

It is easy to speak of lofty goals and noble ambitions; now let me outline a few specifics, a few things that we have tried in the City of Hartford. Granted, our progress is too slow. Granted, our city is filled with too much inequity, too much pain, too many wounded people. But we are slowly winning a righteous fight. First, my five years as mayor have revolved around the commitment to ending the cycle of poverty that traps women and children in lives of despair. Sometimes we have to work one life at a time. On some days we have to reach out and find daycare for one young mother so she can go to work or school. On some days we can implement programs at a local community college that train women for jobs. And then we can always work on the systemic changes needed to break the cycle. In Connecticut we have proposed very strong legislation that, if passed, will end the so-called "welfare incentive" for single parent families. We also have worked very hard to get our legislature to look at universal healthcare and take a stand. We also have a great program on immunization for all of our pre-schoolers, and we have maternal and infant childcare which reaches out to teenage mothers in an effort to encourage them not to be more than one-time teenage mothers. That program encompasses what we call Always Saturday, a program in which we work with teenage fathers. These are just some of the things we've done.

Second, I am striving to make our police department accountable to our citizens. We've heard a lot about community-oriented policing. The police union marched for one year in front of City Hall, picketing me because I was fighting hard for a civilian review board, which is now a reality. They will have their first meeting Tuesday. But, it is not the most comfortable thing to have your quasi-military unit not in support of you. Sometimes the simplest objective of working together is the hardest to obtain. And one thing that women should always remember, and think of as a strength, is that folks underestimate you. And while they're underestimating you, you just move along. So by the time the police union really woke up we already had a civilian review board.

Third, local government has to become a key player in the local economy. We have to lead instead of just regulating. In Hartford we have targeted four neighborhoods for intensive investment. We have marshalled city funds into a comprehensive effort to rehabilitate housing, bolster small businesses, improve public works, and other amenities. By spending money in concentrated doses we can jump-start the local

economy. Merchants can feel our touch and that always helps. At the same time we have formed aggressive partnerships with downtown to anchor our city's central business district, which is under constant competitive pressure from the suburban shopping areas.

I propose that women continue to use the political process to advance the cause of humanity. A woman's political agenda embraces all humanity.

The question is: If we are going to encourage women to run for public office, shouldn't we encourage them to do anything and everything it takes to win? All those things that successful candidates of the old boy network have done for years and succeeded, we must do, too. One: remembering their friends. Two: Not getting mad but getting even. Three: Helping those who in turn help you. Four: Devising a well-oiled network to pass the word and raise the bucks. Won't we be bequeathing to future generations the same kind of sex discrimination that we have had to endure if we are not committed to playing hardball in the political arena?

The next question is: If we are really about being change agents and change makers by implementing a new management style, the women's way of leadership, by listening, motivating, and supporting; by structuring organizations as networks not hierarchies, leading by example and dealing openly rather than by confrontation and by giving orders, shouldn't this be our legacy: Altering the language and psychology of leadership and redirecting the use of power? And this is something in the question and answer period I would like to explore more -- the psychology, leadership, and use of power, because someone said this morning that as long as you play by somebody else's rule you ain't gonna win. And that is very, very true.

And so I hope that people like yourself who are in this room will go out from this session and be rejuvenated and reinvigorated and activate your friends, neighbors, and townspeople because it is true; we can make a difference. We owe it to ourselves and we owe it to our children, our future generations. We want younger people to come in and take these seats, you know? So we can ride off into the sunset and relax. I'm going to go to Zimbabwe, far away.

And just as my final words, an act of faith, I know that we shall ultimately prevail because our cause is right and our demands are just.

Thank you.

Digna Sanchez, Assistant Commissioner, New York City Development Agency: As I thought about the topic before us today and the prestigious women elected officials with whom I am honored to share this panel, I thought I would approach the concept of power from an individual woman's perspective. Clearly, the essence of power is having the capacity to exercise rights and privileges and the ability to exercise authority

and control. When we think of power for the most part the visual image accompanying the word is a masculine one. Though in the English language we don't have gender specific words, for the most part power is viewed as masculine. You see, in Spanish it's real clear. *El poder*, power, is a masculine word. Thus, as women we face an obstacle created by a sense that power is somehow alien to our feminine essence.

As so many of us painfully know, there are hundreds of thousands of women who experience the oppression of being controlled by others, usually their husbands, their boyfriends, their bosses, and for our younger women, their fathers and sometimes even their brothers. The control that is exercised over so many women individually and over all of us collectively by the societal acceptance of our role as subservient is too often sustained by the use of violence -- domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment. These are the violent manifestations of an insidious social policy that is meant to keep us in a powerless, alienated position.

On this panel we are talking about power for women in the cities, and yet we must keep in perspective the connections between the personal and the political. I remember in the early 70s when a group of Puerto Rican women here in New York City, amongst them Dr. Helen Rodriguez who is now the President of the American Public Health Association, and other women who you may not know -- Carmen Vasquez, Marisa Castilla, Vivian Rivera, myself and others -- organized with some white women abortion rights activists, such as Esther Armstrong and Rhonda Copelon, the Committee to End Sterilization Abuse. Here was an effort that took the reality that almost half of Puerto Rican women of child-bearing age had been sterilized and we analyzed it for what it was: A policy of population control and a total disregard and disrespect for Puerto Rican women's rights for reproductive choice. This was an issue that touched a larger sector of the Puerto Rican population.

We went out into the city, we organized marches and rallies, and we circulated petitions in the South Bronx, in the Lower East Side, and in barrios throughout all the Puerto Rican communities in New York City. We took the issue to public hearings in City Hall. They never saw so many Puerto Ricans in City Hall. And we took it to Washington. As a result we won a regulatory change which required a 30-day waiting period prior to the procedure of sterilization being performed. The practice prior to that had become one where a woman would go in to give birth -- picture this -- and in the midst of labor the doctor would tell her, "Listen with just a few more minutes, a minor adjustment, I'll solve your problem for future pregnancies." And as all of you who have been in labor know, if at that point somebody offered you a way out you might take it; many of these women did. Apart from that, they were told that the tubes were going to be tied. Now, "tied," *amarrar los tubos* in Spanish, what does that leave in the mind of the women? That you can untie them when you want, and so many women said, "Okay. Tie my tubes, when I want them I'll get them untied." Lo and behold, they are not to be untied.

So the importance of this minor victory -- because it is a minor but significant victory

nonetheless -- is that we were able to bring about a change because we were able to pull together and mobilize many of the women who were affected by this policy, and they took to the streets and said, "*Basta ya*," "No more." This was an exercise of power; the power of women in cities, where we are in large number. For me the lesson was that women will activate themselves on those issues where they see a direct connection to themselves and to their families.

The tremendous energy that can be unleashed has been especially demonstrated in the history of Latin America during the 70s and the 80s. When no one else dared to confront the military dictatorship in Argentina, it was the Mothers of La Plaza de Mayo who took to the streets and in their constant and silent demonstration on behalf of their disappeared children slowly, slowly were that drop on the rock that brought down the military dictatorship. We must remember this. In El Salvador the mothers' committees continuously challenged the officials' lies regarding the death squads. These were, for the most part, poor women. Some couldn't even read or write, but they analyzed their reality, they took action, and they were essential to the change in power which occurred in their nation.

These phenomena are an inspiration to all of us. We must approach our analysis of our reality with this understanding. Women *will* mobilize to defend and to fight for what is truly valuable. And so, it's not surprising that it is women who are especially active in many of the local struggles -- like PTA's, for example. It shouldn't surprise us. We know that women are the essential caretakers and nurturers of our future generations of children. The challenge to the feminist scholar and to the activist is that we must see these organizing efforts as part and parcel of women's striving for equity in the decision-making structures of power. What better example of the training ground that local school politics can be than Manhattan Borough President Ruth Messinger? A local school board activist before she became a councilwoman, now Borough President and the future mayor, governor, who knows?

The importance of bringing a feminist consciousness to these local struggles can not be over-emphasized. Yes, it's true that many are tied to the specific dynamic of local players, but the issues are not unique and the lessons to be drawn, the experiences gained, should be seen as the building blocks to broader state, national, and even international power. The process of women building a political power base is a slow and difficult one. And I would like to point to the situation of Latina women specifically.

In New York City the largest and oldest Latino community is the Puerto Rican community. When you review the history of the major social movements in the Puerto Rican community you find that women were the overwhelming majority of those involved in the struggle for bi-lingual education, community controlled schools, housing, and on and on. And yet, when the power base had been developed enough for Latinos to campaign for political office it wasn't the women who were put forward but the men. For the most part we have had one Puerto Rican woman elected official

until this last election. We now have four: one city councilwoman, two at the state level -- Senator Olga Mendez and State Assemblywoman Nellie Santiago -- and one U.S. Representative, Nydia Velasquez, who is the first Puerto Rican woman to be elected to Congress.

But here again as Latinas we are confronted with the struggle within our own community to achieve equity, our share of the political power, which to a large extent our gender creates. The traditional male power brokers in the existing majority power structure have for the most part extended their helping hand to help the male power structure in the Latino community. This, of course, is beginning to change but ever so slowly. Women have gained experience and have created enough of a consciousness about the need to promote our own progressive women who understand women's issues for public office. Locally, for example, during Nydia Velasquez's campaign we organized Latina women's committees and house parties to raise money, we had to pound the streets, to do the kind of politicking that we knew needed to be done in order for Nydia to win. And she did.

Nationally Latina women are beginning to organize to help Latina candidates run for and win elected office, as well as to promote Latina leadership (because not all decision-making takes place in a legislative or governmental context). Through organizations such as the National Hispano Leadership Institute this is beginning to happen. NHLI is now entering its sixth year and has already begun to have an impact on breaking the isolation of Latinas in policy making positions. One of the loneliest situations is when you are "the only," and you get tired of being "the only." And so it's really wonderful to know that there are other women who are feeling that way who want to get together to get more in office so you're not "the only." And this is one of the things that the National Hispano Leadership Institute is doing by creating a network, a national network, of mutual support and analysis.

Of course, we must then go on to forge the list of other women's organizations in other communities. This is essential if we as women are to obtain our rights and share of the power. The Clinton Administration now affords us a real window of opportunity and we have to make sure that we take full advantage. There are many, many boards and commissions that we need to make sure women get appointed to. It's not just the elected office. There are many, many places where decisions that affect us, that affect the nation, are being made. And we need to make sure that we position ourselves so that we are members of those boards, commissions, etc. And this is at many levels, from the local, to the state, to the national level.

The bottom line is that we must not overlook the leadership of women wherever it is manifested, be it at community church or the local PTA, because those are the building blocks that are going to help us move forward as a gender. And, of course, the good news is that women, for the most part, promote the kinds of aggressive causes that this country so desperately needs.

What we must do, the challenge before us, is to weave this leadership from all levels together so that we can have the united force we will need to bring about the changes which will place women in their rightful position at the decision-making table. That is the challenge before all of us. Thank you.

Ruth Messinger, President, Borough of Manhattan: I'm delighted that Carrie and Digna spoke first because I think it gives us all sort of a chance to build on and say some different things and then turn it over to some dialogue.

I am, actually was, a sponsor of charter reform in this city. There were a lot of areas in which we made mistakes and many areas in which we did not go far enough, but I disagree with the comfortable newspaper characterization that because Borough Presidents don't vote at the Board of Estimate we have less power. And I don't want to talk about that at great length except to say that I directly budget 15 or 20 million dollars a year which Borough Presidents did not do before, and I have an infinitely better window on making land use and facility siting decisions than anybody ever did at the Board of Estimate. I only make the point and do that sort of self-pleading because I think it's really critical to the issues in this discussion.

I hope that Ronnie will talk a little about the experience she has had at the hands of the Council leadership for the last three and a half years, and that I had for 12 years, which is the difference between a legislative body having power and any individual member of that legislature having power, particularly one who has a different agenda and wants to see change. Being off of a voting body and having essentially executive authority puts me in the realm that I think Digna was talking about: what it means to actually be in charge of a staff, to select a staff, to run an agency, to try to do things differently. For me it was a welcome change after 12 years of City Council service which I always thought of as being in someone else's house -- very often the house of somebody who does everything -- from how he sets his table to how he welcomes his guests to when he turns out the lights and shoos people out -- differently from the way it is done in my home. So I would make a strong point about the importance of women in executive positions and the importance of women in appointed office.

There are five Borough President's right now and it is dramatic -- now this is more to Ester's point -- it is dramatic how differently the women and the men behave. This goes way beyond the point where we share common cause on issues. One of the men retired to this job from Congress and that's how he sees it: as retirement. The two other men who were Borough Presidents before don't like the changes because since Charter Revision their decision-making has been lessened in the public eye, and they haven't figured out that they now have a different kind of leverage. So they spend an extraordinary amount of time whining about the new charter. And the two women, who often don't agree on issues, have approached the job with a new kind of enthusiasm, have emphasized the issue that it is possible to act on and to implement

something that has a lot to do with what Digna and Carrie were talking about: bringing more people into the decision-making process. We think it is quite wonderful that over the last three months in very tough sessions, we hammered out a joint position on education decentralization. And when we take it around to the legislature we get asked, "Are you just doing this because you want more power?" even after we point out that, in fact, we are giving up one power in order to get another one. We point out that we're doing this because between the two of us, and you'll all love this, we have 50 years of experience on PTA's, community school boards, and the City Council Education Committee, and we know a lot about what's wrong with the schools. That leaves a great many male legislators to whom we talk speechless, which is exactly how we like it.

Carrie is an extraordinary piece of history. She's also a part of a history that's changing. 20 percent of all of the cities in this country have women mayors. You have no idea how many cities scattered around the country of various sizes previously had women mayors. Some of them go way, way back. I remember vividly in 1985, when I was supporting Carol Bellamy, for mayor the number of interviews of hers that I sat in on at which a member of the New York City press said, "Do you think New York is ready for a woman mayor?" And this at a point at which Chicago had had a woman mayor, San Antonio had a woman mayor (back for the second time), and San Jose had a woman mayor. In Texas, every large city had a woman mayor and there was a point two years ago where a hundred cities in Texas had women mayors.

I want you to focus, when we talk about these great gains, both on how far we've come -- about a 300 or 400 percent increase in women holding positions of power both legislative and executive in the last 18 years -- and how far we still have to go, because 20 percent is embarrassingly small. A 300 percent increase in the number of women in the United States Senate means that there are now 6 of them. The Senate, which after all determines a great deal about our lives and which most recently filibustered the new economic stimulus package, has got 94 men, 99 White people. It does not reflect the country and that seems to me to have something to do with the decisions it makes.

Now, we're going to have to talk a little bit about women in cities, so I just want to emphasize the point that Digna was making. Women are a majority of the population nationally. They are an overwhelming majority of the active and voting population in most cities because of a whole set of things that have happened to families and that have happened in some of the poorer communities, many of them not great, but still we end up emerging. In the Borough of Manhattan women are 58 percent of the voters. It's quite astounding.

The issues that cities, or that cities and counties, that local governments, deal with are all of the issues of women's lives. We've got a lot of people concerned, including me, about what the White House under Hillary Clinton is going to propose on health care. Maybe we can't restructure our health care system in three months, but it is clear that it is no accident that there is an attempt by the new president to move the health care

agenda this quickly. When *Ms.* did a poll before the '92 election that produced all those results for women, 86 percent of the random sample of women that they polled across the country said health care was an extremely important priority and 40 percent said it was the number one priority. That kind of result is very different than a report from men, but it shows that you cannot keep a group, at least a group of women, powerless forever and we're coming into our own.

Now, I should talk a little bit about the surveys that have been done. Those of you who really want to pursue this at an academic level, in addition to reading Ester's book, should pay attention to the statistics that come out of the Center of the American Woman in Politics, which is part of the Eagleton Institute [at Rutgers University], because they study us and they produce surveys. I'm not going to give you a whole lot of numbers, but women public officials address a different *universe* of issues; stick with tough, likely-to-lose-issues much longer, and as a result, realize some results; and are reported by their male colleagues to change the nature of debate and discussion and to focus on issues in committees that didn't previously have women as members.

For me what is even more important and what I will read you is not on the issues but on process, because it seems to me that a big issue for government right now is that most people think it has nothing to do with their lives and we all understand the extent to which that sometimes steals the cake. So a style that goes down to those grassroots, that meets with women who are leaders of PTA's or leaders of neighborhood groups, that tries to work with those people on the front lines who know the situation best, is a style much more likely to change current very negative attitudes toward everybody in positions of power. And according to the CAWP women are more likely to bring citizens into the process. They are more likely to opt, both in how they run their jurisdiction and how they vote, for government in public view rather than government behind closed doors. And they are much more responsive to groups that were previously denied full access to the policy-making process.

One of the things I love about having an executive position is that I have a staff that is 52 percent female at all levels of power and decision-making. We do a tremendous amount to involve the people, even those people who clearly disagree for some reason or another with something I am about to do. The notion that there are actually elected officials who would like to see you even if you are not going to simply do what they say is really astounding. We have brought women living with HIV/AIDS into their own working group and they have shaped the entire AIDS program for the borough. We have consulted with community groups that didn't want facilities even when they knew the facilities were going to be located in their communities so that they could shape and influence what kind of decisions were going to be made. I just think this is a different approach to government. It produces many more tense moments in which you're really doing the exchange and doing the tough negotiation. But in my judgment it pays off in the kinds of outcomes you get in terms of substance and it pays off tremendously in how a group of people, understandably feeling sort of disaffected and disenfranchised, begin to see their own empowerment and recognize the possibility of

using government to improve the quality of their lives.

Even though, as a whole, I often don't agree with the individual actions or decisions of the Dinkins administration or some of its commissioners, the city agencies that control at least half the city's budget are now run by women. There hasn't been much coverage about that fact yet, but think about how much attention is paid to whether there is going to be one more woman in Bill Clinton's cabinet. I mean, you just need to look at the fact that the Human Resources Administration, the Community Development Agency, the Parks Department, the Department of Sanitation, the Department of Finance, or the Department of Health in this city and the Housing Authority and the city housing agency are all run by women of many different ethnic backgrounds. I think this is at least worthy of note as we struggle to get some different decisions made and to get some decisions made in a different fashion.

Last point, because I never believe in sitting down without telling people something they have to do. Please, in addition to voting in the School Board election May 4th, in addition to thinking about running for office yourselves, we need you to support women who are running for office, African American women, Latina women, Asian women, Caucasian women. We need you to think about supporting women and there are a lot of ways you can do this. I will mention only two. One: In the State of New York we have no campaign finance reforms, no campaign finance control, and it is my judgement that this is not unrelated to the fact that in the state legislature only 27 out of 211 seats are occupied by women. This is a specific place where the Governor regularly says he wants to see change but nobody seems to be able to move a bill through the Assembly or the Senate and you should at least be alert to those legislators that are trying. And the second is when candidates come to you and talk about their campaign, recognize that they need your help. They need your involvement, they need your active involvement. If you can give money, give money. If you can't give money, give time. If you can't give time, think of something else that you can do that will help to change all of the faces of the people who are in local, state, and national government before it's too late.

Ronnie Eldridge, New York City Councilmember: The seat that I hold in the Council is the seat that used to be Ruth's seat, so I come with this great tradition of rebellion, disagreement, and she may prove to be more resilient than I am, but she's younger.

It is true that the Council through the new charter supposedly has more power and that the Borough President does have less. And I think that is true, but it is really the Council speaker that has the power and not the Councilmembers. It is the Borough President that has the staff which we spar back and forth with all the time. I feel that the Councilmembers have a very limited staff intentionally as part of the power structure of the Council in order to sort of keep us in our place. My staff is underpaid

and overworked, yet when I look at the executive office of the Borough President with -- how many people do you have working for you?

Ruth Messinger: I would say a hundred, I don't know, 95.

Ronnie Eldridge: But it is true that whatever political office you hold if you're smart and committed and passionate you can make it as effective as possible. And certainly, the Borough President has, even though she doesn't have any power...

So, what kind of power do women in the cities have? I think we have enormous potential power. We are the majority of the voters. We are the people that begin the life cycle, from whom we get all the different needs for public service. We are the people who know best what we need in our own neighborhoods and homes. And if we could come together with all of the special groups we could have enormous power, but at the present moment I think we don't have enormous power. And I think the failure to organize and to put all these women's groups together politically or electorally has been one of the greatest disappointments of the many years that I have been active in politics. I think we tend to look at electoral politics with a different eye and we certainly tend to view city electoral politics with less interest and certainly less respect. Now, part of that is because the people in the city politics have historically not only not respected themselves but not respected each other. And a great part of it, I think, is that the media -- I have a husband who is a journalist --

Unfortunately, side 1 of the tape ends here. Side 2 begins with the following questions and answers. Ronnie Eldridge's statement was cut off. She should have the opportunity to insert her statement.

Q: How do you feel about a third party, a women's party?

Eldridge: There's always been some discussion about it, but it's never really been able to replace the two-party system. But the threat of a third party has been very influential at different times in the past at all levels of government. The problem with it is that it's an enormous job. I'm not an authority or a political scientist, but it seems that results are essential. When we've tried to set up a third party there has been a lack of cooperation on behalf of the women within the Democratic and Republican Parties who don't want to give up their position of power within the party, so you almost become a party of outsiders which is very difficult. I've always liked the idea, so I don't object to it. I think that there are times when you have to do that. The question really is how effective you can be and I think that's what we have to look at.

Fuchs: You know the Right-To-Life people did that. They organized the party and in

the 70s they were extremely effective because they controlled a percentage of the vote, and they were able to oust very important senators all across the country; Diana Birch was a victim of the Right-To-Lifers. They used their power by endorsing candidates from the two major parties and so they had great leverage that way, but Ronnie's point is very well-taken. The organization of a third party requires an extraordinary effort. But I think it's something we all should start thinking about again as a leverage, like the liberal and conservative parties provide leverage in New York to candidates with cross-endorsements. I think a women's party, if it could mobilize enough women, could potentially do that. And maybe it's time to start thinking about that again.

Perry: Well, one thing it would do, it would hone the message in terms of how we get information out. The marketing of ideas is really bad in terms of people understanding what's going on. When I think of the numbers of people who come out and vote in Puerto Rico -- 80, 90 percent -- I know that their issues are well-defined. People know exactly what they're going to do when they come out to vote. Our system makes the issues so fuzzy that people don't know exactly what's going on. I think if you talked about having a third party at least it would propel candidates to begin to define what the issues are so people could understand the investment in it for them. I mean, if I've got to worry about paying my mortgage, if I've got to worry about going shopping, and I elected you -- you know, I elected you, Messinger, now you take care of all of that and I am going to take care of my house. Somehow or other this whole thing about how we're in it together has to be found in a way that people can grab hold of. Local government has all this over your life before you're born 'till after you're dead. I mean, you know, we regulate your life from zero to bye-bye. And so, I'm saying that we don't market it well to the community so that they can feel invested. Maybe talking about a third party will encourage people to say, "Why? Why are you talking about a woman's party like this?" You know? And then the issues will come out, hopefully. And so I think that maybe that's something to explore in terms of the impetus to get us to get out the message...

Fuchs: Scare the hell out of the Democratic Party.

Perry: Scare them good.

Q: I'm a senior right now at Barnard, and when I graduate in May I'll be working for a U.S. Senator. I've become a little bit disillusioned with the voice that people actually do have in the political system, although I still want to become involved in politics. And I'm wondering first, how can young women or any women who want to enter the political process become involved and, second, and once they're involved, how can they be a voice for women?

Sanchez: As a young person you need to gain some life experience by pounding the streets and going to those meetings and learning what's happening in your constituency, in your community. It's the non-sexy work that has to happen, and it's the only way you're going to learn and it's what is going to keep our elected officials connected; as

Ruth's office is. I firmly believe this, and I think that as a young person who wants to work in the field of politics, politics is about regulating people's lives, bottom line. And so let's learn about people's lives in the best way we can. And part of it is participating with people in all of the different organized ways that people can.

Perry: Starting at the local level and at the state.

Eldridge: You've asked a very good question. I think we need also to spend a lot of time thinking about it.

We do a lot of the constituent work, but I frankly feel elected officials shouldn't be doing that kind of work because the government itself should be doing it and responding. You can see how big the debate is when you consider that we just changed the name of the President of the City Council to the Public Advocate. We're going to elect a person to be the Public Advocate, so why do you elect the Mayor, and why do you elect the Borough President, and why do you elect members of the Council? The Council is supposed to have over-sight of those city agencies, the Mayor's supposed to appoint the commissioners, and you're supposed to have agencies that work well. And if every political official does this kind of work, partly because it's expected and you want to help people and people call you, then that's your role, and nobody's willing to give it up, even though we're duplicating each other and we're wasting time and energy.

But there are other ways of organizing. Ruth and I co-chair a committee of advocates from all over -- child advocates, women's advocates, domestic violence areas -- to produce a report on family violence that will come out next week. We're trying to bring child abuse and domestic violence together under a different word and move it up on the agenda. But it's those issues that I think that young people should be involved with. I started with battered women a long time ago and working with women's imprisonment, battered women who killed, and we had a battered women's defense committee, the Battered Women's Defense Fund, and you'd be surprised how quickly you have a mandate that the television talks about and the newspapers write about. I think we helped get off a good number of women who were on trial by being there and bringing attention to it.

Messinger: I do want to add to all of the things that have been said. First of all, I suspect, since you're smart and you're graduating from Barnard, that you've figured out that elected officials maintain constituent services because it's a way to make some random number of people feel very happy. It's a job they give to whoever they can find to give it to. It's the highest turnover in many offices. I'm a professional social worker and I know how many social workers are hired to run constituent service offices for members of Congress and U.S. senators, and are never allowed to be part of anything else that's going on in the office. So you have our sympathies.

But the question is one Ronnie posed: why aren't the agencies themselves doing this?

Well, we're a long way from doing that. But what constituent service people can do is bring a series of complaints to the attention of policy, program, and budget people. New policies come out of a lot of advocates and constituent workers saying these are the things that work and don't work.

Last point: Working in campaigns is the best way to learn about politics. Some campaigns pay, but most people don't get paid for their first campaign or two. There are campaigns, mine is one, there are plenty of others, where you really learn grassroots organizing. I promise you that will stand you in better stead than almost anything that you may ever do. We have trained a lot of low-level organizers who have gone on to use their skills in local campaigns around both candidates and issues.

Perry: Yes, but the world of campaigning is different from the world of governing. One is much more exciting. I just have to say a word for constituent service. I feel that it is extremely important even though it is not very seductive, but it is important because you do build public policy on what people care about in their contact with you. So, it may be laborious, but it is one way for you not to feel grandiose about being in a political office. You know, really to understand the pain that continues out there and the mounting frustration that people in the community have with the system. And I can't think of a much more dignified role for public officials who can lessen some of the frustration of a citizen who from day to day doesn't know what the heck she's paying taxes for.

Q: Mayor Perry, you said that you have just put into effect new welfare rules that would end welfare dependency among single parent families. Does that mean that it's a mandatory welfare program?

Perry: No. What I said was that there is legislation now at the General Assembly about welfare reforms. We are working on legislation that would say, number one, that there's going to be some mandate in terms of work -- we don't call it Workfare because it has that connotation, but it has to be work -- in terms of job-training and also daycare provision. Also, it says that if there is a husband around he can move back in the house and you won't lose your welfare. So, those are the kinds of reforms that we're talking about which are incentives for families to stay together. It all depends on people committing to being part of a job-training, then they are followed for 6 months when they get the job to make sure they stay on the job. So, it's a different approach in terms of moving people off of welfare so they can actually take care of themselves. Wish us well that it's approved in the General Assembly.

Fuchs: I would like just to give our panelists a minute, literally, to make a final comment. Why don't I start with Ronnie.

Eldridge: I want to just finish responding to an earlier question, if that's okay. I don't mean to demean the needs of constituents. Carrie was perfectly right when she said it's what makes you see what's happening. Also it gives you ideas so you can

frame legislation based on their experiences: you know when there's something wrong with an agency when you get a pattern complaint. For example, I began working for the ATM Security Bill this year as the result of being mugged at an ATM and after hearing my constituents' stories.

It isn't until you travel around that you begin to how big the problems of this city are, especially for women. Poverty and racism, I think, are the two major problems. There are parts of this city that are far more troubled than Managua was at the height of the problems in Nicaragua, but we don't see them even though they're our own city because we don't travel to those neighborhoods. You've got to find a way to get involved. And you've got to find a way to see what other people's lives are. It's so essential. I mean, what we do is a world of putting families in welfare hotels. We're putting kids in situations that are so traumatizing to them and then we're shocked when they grow up and they don't have the same value system that we have. Unless we bring that broader understanding into public policy, we are not going to succeed. And I do believe we can succeed. Thanks.

Messinger: We have to have the sense that it makes a huge difference, a huge difference, who gets elected and what kinds of issues they address. But change comes only slowly; it comes much faster if you can find ways -- whether it is working in campaigns, or whether it is working with advocates, or working on a long-range political party, or an electoral, or a fund-raising issue -- to keep demanding accountability, and to keep thinking about what step is next. And, the women that you have elected to office or who have been appointed to office need you as an on-going force with or without a woman's party to keep helping us make a difference.

Perry: We've all shared our frustration in front of the table and behind the table and I just want to leave you with something from Maya Angelou about stress:

"Stress, let me tell you. If you take an ordinary rock and subject it to stress it becomes sand. If you add more time and more strength and pressure it becomes a lump of coal. But if you add extreme pressure and a long period of time, honey, you got yourself a diamond."

Sanchez: How can I say anything after that? Well, the only thing I would want to leave you with is the incredible importance that each one of you has in the political process, that the elected officials or appointed officials are only as good as all of you -- and I include myself in that -- make them and help them to be. And that's the message that I think is the challenge for all of us.

Fuchs: Thank you all.