

UN WOMEN CONFERENCE

June 11, 2011, NC State University

I want to remind you all how the year 2011 began. “The Week of January 8th, we saw a white, Catholic, male, Republican judge murdered on his way to greet a Democratic, Jewish, US Congresswomen, who was his friend. **Her** life was saved **initially** by a 20 year-old, Mexican-American, gay, college student, and **eventually** by a Korean, American, combat surgeon, and this all was **eulogized** by our African American President.”

We are at a transformative moment with a multicultural, multiracial President who reflects the future of our country. It is also reflective of the state of North Carolina I might add, as we’re now considered one of the five minority/majority states, soon to have more people of color than Caucasians with Hispanics now being the largest minority of 1 in 4 people.

I want to talk this morning about a few of the key issues impacting women across our state, issues like health care, workplace issues, childcare, transportation and safety, and in doing so, tell you about the NC Council for Women which can help you put a human face on some of these issues in our state.

I’m a firm believer that gender inequality at every level of our society is the root cause of many of our societal problems – starting in the family, in the workplace and ending in the statehouse.

FAMILY: We know that when women have financial independence and the family responsibilities are shared between both people, their partners most likely don’t beat them, their children respect them and women feel like they’re making a contribution to their families well being.

A while back there was a great story in the NYT about an Indian woman who is a weaver and had never been outside of her home in a rural village in India until she was well into adulthood and she decided to sell her pillows at local markets to help support her large family. Her moment of liberation came many years ago when a nonprofit formed a unit in her village to help preserve endangered handicrafts and provide the artists a form of alternative employment. She said, “In those days, my husband was in charge of everything. What could I do, with no skills and no education?” Now, as a globetrotter, an informal ambassador for Sewa and the Crafts Council of India, she finds herself in circumstances she could never have foreseen. “Now that I have my own business and make my own money, my husband shows me respect. There are occasions when he helps me out with my accounts. “He’s my secretary, she added with a laugh.”

The Council for Women's 35 Displaced Homemaker programs around the state, focus on women's self sufficiency and economic empowerment, helping to ensure financial stability in families affected by loss of income.

Now the Workplace: The participation rate for women 20 and older in the labor force is holding steady at 61%. However, women continue to make up a disproportionate share of administrative jobs, and lag far behind men in the higher-paying STEM fields – Science, Technology, Engineering and Math. And men still get paid more to do the same jobs: Across all educational levels, women made on average 75% as much as their male counterparts in 2009.

One contributing factor to wage disparity of course is the fact that women don't negotiate salaries like men do. Mika Brazenski, the co-host of the TV program, Morning Joe, has a new book, **Knowing Your Value: Women, Money and Getting What you're Worth**. She interviews numerous very successful women about their experiences attempting to negotiate a wage that reflects their real worth in the workplace. Most of them have struggled to remain competitive with their male colleagues, being referred to as difficult, stubborn, and strident. We women all have to work at bringing attention to ourselves, our ideas and our achievements and become better at negotiating our salaries.

Let's not forget though, that over half of the 37 million Americans living in poverty today are women. Black and Latina women are at least twice as likely as white women to be living in poverty.

HEALTHCARE: Access to affordable health care continues to be a major challenge for women, especially poor women. For women over 60, heart disease is the #1 killer and 1 in 3 women dies of cardio vascular disease. **WOMEN ARE NOT JUST SMALL MEN.** Our health needs and concerns are different. It's only in the last 20 years, after using **women** as their subjects, that doctors have learned that the symptoms of heart disease are different between men and women.

Women between the ages of 18 and 40 go to a health care provider primarily for reproductive health issues. Yet, women's reproductive health is under constant attack in the political arena because of the volatile word **abortion**. I'm a huge proponent of family planning around the world and the efforts of the United Nations and other organizations to limit population growth so that our planet can actually produce the food required to **feed** the number of people who live on it. And in this country I'm a huge fan of organizations like Planned Parenthood, which is providing quality, affordable health care to many poor and underinsured women and men who otherwise would have no access to yearly exams, breast exams, STD testing and contraceptives. Yet there have been no fewer than 11 pieces of legislation currently being debated in Raleigh that threaten access to reproductive health care and family planning.

In addition, Planned Parenthood's Teens Taking Action program should be operating in every school district in the country as an antidote to the teen pregnancy problem. We simply have to reach the middle school girls about making important choices, including relationship choices that will affect their future educational and employment opportunities. If Children are to reach their full potential they need to be raised by adults, not by teenage children.

CHILD CARE: Of course affordable child care continues to plague working women at all levels of the work force. I encounter young working women all the time who are searching for a good day care center or they've lost their Nanny because she had to return to their home country and they're frantically trying to locate a babysitter. But we also know about women at the lower end of the income scale who don't make enough to afford child care and have to depend on relatives to care for their children. Listen to the voice of a real North Carolinian who lives in Mecklenburg County.

"I work for an airline company and was doing well enough to buy my own home. However, due to cuts in the industry, I was forced to take a lower paying job in order to maintain my employment. Because I had not been able to access a child care subsidy in my county due to a waiting list, I recently lost my home / and my four year old and I have spent nights in my car. Now I stay with friends and family members for a few days at a time. I need help with child care so I can **keep** my job and not be homeless." Her story isn't that unusual – finding affordable, quality child care is one of the biggest barriers to holding onto and obtaining a job.

Regrettably, there is now a waiting list of 45,500 children eligible, but not receiving these quality child care subsidies from the state.

TRANSPORTATION: This brings me to transportation, another big challenge for women. I remember reading the book *Nickel and Dimed* by Barbara Ehrenreich. She left her home and her job as a writer, put her car in the garage, took the cheapest lodgings she could find, and accepted whatever jobs she was offered. Moving from Florida to Maine to Minnesota, she worked as a waitress, a hotel maid, a cleaning woman, a nursing home aide, and a Wal-Mart sales clerk. She lived in trailer parks and crumbling residential motels. Very quickly, she discovered that no job is truly "unskilled," that even the lowliest occupations require exhausting mental and muscular effort. She offers a rare view of how "prosperity" looks to a single woman living at the bottom of the wage scale. Because she relied on public transportation, it was a huge expense in her budget. But think of the towns and cities in North Carolina that don't **have** reliable transportation, not to mention the small towns and rural areas that have none.

SAFETY: Women's safety remains a societal problem of great magnitude and it's one that the CFW witnesses every day. This next story comes from Turning Point, our Domestic Violence Center in Union County. It's called Free At Last!

The popular Disney movie, "*Tangled*," is based on the fairy tale character, Rapunzel, a young woman kept prisoner in a high tower for years. There was no one to encourage her, no one to protect her. And, though she was a very beautiful young woman, the world around her only reflected gloom and hopelessness.

In some ways, Rapunzel is like Tricia, a young woman who came to Turning Point several months ago. Tricia had a daughter named Lila. For years, her husband had kept Tricia in a "tower," forbidding her to have friends, money, a job, or ever to speak her own feelings. Fear of being beaten or degraded by his constant insults created for Tricia the worst kind of prison – it was a dark prison of the mind. Finally, after a particularly violent episode, she'd had enough of his painful abuse. But she truly had no place to go. And then, she discovered Turning Point.

Once she realized she was safe from her abuser, Tricia worked hard to escape the emotional prison that had held her captive. She enrolled Lila in a new school and she began taking college classes. It wasn't long until she had found a job and began looking for a place to call their own-- free forever from her "tower" of despair.

A new survey conducted by the National Network to End Domestic Violence reveals telling information about domestic violence services in the U.S. On September 15, 2010 – just one 24 hour period – domestic violence victim advocates served more than 70,000 adults and children and answered more than 20,000 emergency hotline calls. That's nearly 833 calls per hour.

Though the economy doesn't **cause** domestic violence, factors associated with economic uncertainties can increase the severity and frequency of abuse. The 100 domestic violence programs in North Carolina reporting to the Council for Women's annual statistical survey/ report increased demand for their services at the same time that state and federal funds for services are being threatened. Albemarle Hopeline is one such program that provides direct and preventive services to victims of family violence, sexual assault and teen dating violence in six counties in Eastern North Carolina. They operate a 24-hour crisis line, counseling, court advocacy, emergency shelter for victims and their children, a crisis response team, volunteer training and education and they operate thrift stores and plan creative fundraising activities in the communities to supplement the state and federal funds.

People ask me why we don't focus more on prevention of violence against women. The simple answer is that it's very difficult to raise money for prevention. However, there **are** some innovative approaches being implemented in attempts to address prevention and the ramifications for children and families.

There's a **growing movement across the country to engage MEN** in ending violence against women. No one will argue that we need more shelters and more services for the victims of violence. But we also need to change social norms and prevent that violence from occurring in the first place. Organizations like Men Stopping Violence, Coaching Boys into Men, and Men Can Stop Rape are leading the call to redefine masculinity and male strength as part of preventing men's violence against women. Here in North Carolina, A Call to Men, whose founder, Tony Porter lives in Charlotte and travels all over the country is engaging men to be more accountable and become part of the solution instead of part of the problem.

There's a **new website** developed by two Durham women, one a filmmaker, **Survivor to Survivor.com** where you'll learn a lot about domestic violence and should you suspect that someone you know needs help or support, this will provide the tools to help.

InterAct, here in Wake County, runs a violence prevention curriculum in the public schools focusing on Teen Dating Violence

South Asians, with many cultural norms not widely known, are a growing population in North Carolina. They are now being served by Kiran, a multi-cultural, non-religious, community based, South Asian organization that promotes the self-reliance and empowerment of South Asian women and men who are in crisis.

In July, 2010, President Obama signed the **Tribal Law and Order Act** which addresses many issues impacting the safety of American Indian women. The Council for Women has begun, in partnership with the Commission on Indian Affairs, and the Coalition Against Domestic Violence, an outreach effort to American Indian women that we hope will result in better services to those women who experience abuse and violence at more than double the rate of any other population of women.

Most of us live pretty safe and comfortable lives, but in my position, I'm reminded every day of all the women out there who are not safe and secure and they're white, black, American Indian, Hispanic, Asian and they're in the inner cities, in rural towns and in suburbs at all economic levels. More than 50 women in North Carolina were killed last year by their husbands or partners and thousands more were injured, many not reported out of fear, and still the issue of women's safety is not openly discussed

The Council for Women is now working with a group of business leaders to design a multi-year state-wide public awareness campaign focusing on violence against women. Our hope is that this subject will be out there in front of people as they drive to work, watch TV, listen to the radio, attend big public events, attend religious services. It's high time that violence against women begins to share space with other maladies affecting women like breast cancer, heart disease, . . .

I want to close by sharing with you what I perceive to be a major problem we face as a country and state, that I think will not be easily solved but could be the most important factor in promoting positive changes for women and families in the future.

Only 17% of the United States Congress is women, six out of fifty US Senators. Only 6 governors are women, and now in the NC Senate there are only 3 women

I've spent a lot of my adult life working to elect women – first at the federal level, then at the state level both in CA and then in NC. In fact, way back in 80's I was on a panel here in Raleigh, with one of my heroines who later died in 1992. Millicent Fenwick was a Republican Congresswoman from NJ. Back then she was the most fascinating woman I'd ever met. She never graduated from high school, although she studied at Columbia. She smoked Tiparillos and had a very deep voice. She was renowned for her political independence and championed many liberal causes – civil rights, peace in Vietnam, help for the poor, campaign spending limits, gun control, etc. She had many careers – fashion model, author, and editor, and decades of public service. She was involved in a debate over equal rights for women and told the story of a male legislator who said: "I've always thought of women as kissable, cuddly and smelling good." Her reply to him was classic Fenwick: "That's the way I feel about men too. I only hope for your sake that you haven't been disappointed as often as I have."

I feel certain that if Millicent Fenwick were alive today she'd be fighting hard to support our efforts to make the public aware of all of the ways women's safety is impacted – Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, Sex Trafficking, and the real costs of these crimes to families and communities in our country and around the world. We need more smart women like Millicent Fenwick, like Elaine Marshall and Governor Perdue, on our city councils, school boards, and in our state legislatures, who can impact public policy to improve the lives of women and girls. I hope that many of the girls and young women here today will be inspired to study, learn about history, politics and government, get involved in your communities, with the ambition that one day you'll be running for office, you'll be Secretary of State or Governor, or maybe the first woman President.

As Paula Goldman said in Global Voices from a New Generation of Women,

"If you are a woman between the ages of 20 and 40 living anywhere on the globe, you are part of the most educated, professionally empowered, international generation of women ever. It's an inspiring story in a world full of violence and insecurity – a generation of women poised to take the reins of global leadership like no other generation in history." GRAB THOSE REINS!