

Women in Leadership Seminar November 16, 2007



Speaker: Presiding Justice Carol Hunstein, Georgia Supreme Court

Highlights:

Major point: Women are underrepresented in the judiciary system, yet women make up at least 50% of the population in our state.

Carol's Background / Experience:

- Graduated from Stetson w/ a J.D. in 1976 but couldn't get a job with a reputable law firm...because she was a woman. So, started a practice with her husband and looked for clients by going to the Fulton County jail! Got assigned to a misdemeanor case and had to dispose of it by Friday; received \$25 for the work. Although she had a good practice, she found that she wasn't treated that well by male lawyers or judges.
- She had a criminal case; sexual allegations, the jury acquitted the defendant, but she left the courtroom before the jury. Found out later that the judge read the jury the defendant's wrap sheet before sentencing. Wasn't right. She thought, "I could be a better judge than that! I can be fair and I can be impartial, I can treat everyone with dignity and respect."
- Decided to run for judiciary superior court position in Dekalb (judge retired). She was politically naïve. "You are not taken seriously unless your yard signs are stolen!" Surprised herself, she received the highest number of votes in the primary especially considering that previously, there were only four women in the history of the state on the superior court bench. .
- To his credit, Zell Miller-40% of his appointees were women and people of color
- Carol was selected as the chair of the Judicial Gender Bias Commission. Many judges were not taking rape cases or domestic violence cases seriously. Even made victims pay for their "rape kits" – Carol also pointed out that abuse cases lead to murders b/c when a woman chooses to leave the home, her chances of being killed go way up

- Carol decided to put her name in for nomination to the Supreme Court. No woman had ever served on the Georgia supreme court. She made the short list, but wasn't selected- Leah Sears was. But then, another vacancy opened up. She put her name in again. She was the only woman sent over by the Nominating Committee and Zell selected her even though that meant he chose two women in a row – and took some heat for that. (No heat for two men in a row!)
- When Carol ran for election in 2006, and it got ugly. She was told that a movement had started in Texas to get “business-friendly judges” on the bench and she was an unknown. (started by CR) Executive head of the Georgia Chamber expressed opposition openly. A “PAC” was formed - “Safety & Prosperity Coalition” to raise money for the campaign against her. But, she raised \$1.3M, most ever raised in this kind of race. The judge she was running against said he was a Republican, and that she was a conservative, but Carol said “I'm nonpartisan.” She believes judges need to remain nonpartisan.
- Despite some smear tactics to the contrary, 20 elected DA's supported her, said she wasn't soft on crime. She said, “This is about the integrity of the judiciary- if they can buy a judge - justice is at stake.”
- Many judges have decided to retire rather than go through the kind of negative campaign Carol went through.

Personal Challenges / Triumphs:

- Born in Miami, FL. One of five girls. Not the best child! She had polio as a child, then cancer- radiation, then Cancer in remission. Her father told her if she went to college she must pay her own way plus room and board. No one in her family had graduated from college before. At 17 she wanted to go to college, but got married and then the cancer returned and her leg was amputated. Initially disheartened she found out that there was a program for “disabled people” to pay for education. She had \$20 a week to live on and to raise her son. But, in 1970/71, got a marketing degree- she was the only woman in business classes. She took a vocational test that told her she would be a good military officer (but she figured they weren't taking anyone legged officers) or a lawyer.
- At Stetson Law School her entering class had 6 women out of 65 students

Questions:

- Why run for office?
 - Because our systems needs you.
 - Women in the US aren't making the same strides as in other countries.
 - The only way to change things is if we have the courage to put ourselves out there. - step up.

- At the end of your life, you have to be proud of what you've done. It's important to live your life with integrity, courage and honesty.
- There's been a deterioration in the family- can't raise children in a drug infested neighborhood.
- The future is our children
- When I went to law school I was mainly looking for a career, in which I could support my child.
- Real passion for law came when I was able to help someone
- Part of the problem in wrongful convictions is problems in eye-witness testimony

Audience Member:

- Works as advocate and teaches school part time
 - Carol says- go to political heads in community and talk to them
 - There are organizations- White House Project, etc. join those networks
- Two schools in metro- Atlanta area offer part time law schools
 - John Marshall Law
 - Georgia State