

WORKING FAMILIES POLICY SUMMIT
JANUARY 18, 2007
SACRAMENTO CONVENTION CENTER
PATTY BERG REMARKS

THANK YOU FOR HAVING ME HERE TODAY. I'M PLEASED AND HONORED TO BE HERE REPRESENTING THE LEGISLATIVE WOMEN'S CAUCUS.

AS YOU KNOW, THE LEGISLATIVE WOMEN'S CAUCUS HAS ALWAYS BEEN A DEPENDABLE VOICE OF SUPPORT FOR WORKING FAMILIES. THE CAUCUS HAS A HISTORY OF BLOCKING PROPOSALS THAT WOULD MAKE IT HARDER FOR WORKING PEOPLE TO TAKE CARE OF THEIR CHILDREN. AND THAT'S CERTAINLY NOT GOING TO CHANGE ... YOU CAN COUNT ON THAT.

NOW, BEFORE I GO ON, LET ME PAUSE AND THANK KATE KARPILOW FOR HER WORK IN PUTTING TODAY'S EVENT TOGETHER. THANK YOU KATE! WHAT A TERRIFIC AGENDA! I ALSO WANT TO THANK THE MANY PANEL PARTICIPANTS AND SPEAKERS, AS I KNOW MANY OF THEM HAVE SPENT MONTHS PREPARING THEIR PRESENTATIONS.

I ALSO WANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE SENATOR CHRISTINE KEHOE, MY PREDECESSOR AS CHAIR OF THE LEGISLATIVE WOMEN'S CAUCUS. SENATOR KEHOE HAD HOPED TO TALK WITH YOU TODAY ABOUT THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE CAUCUS. BUT, AS SOME OF YOU MAY KNOW, THE GOVERNOR HAS APPOINTED HER TO THE STATEWIDE BROADBAND TASK FORCE, AND HER NEW RESPONSIBILITIES THERE MADE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR HER TO BE HERE.

PERHAPS I CAN USE SENATOR KEHOE'S COMMITMENTS AS A NICE SEGUE INTO THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF WOMEN IN GOVERNMENT, AND THE MANY WAYS IN WHICH OUR EFFORTS EFFECT THE LIVES OF REAL PEOPLE, PERHAPS NO ONE MORE SO THAN THE WOMEN AND MEN WHO WORK AND STRUGGLE TO RAISE A FAMILY, MANY OF WHOM ARE HARDLY TWO PAYCHECKS AWAY FROM REAL PROBLEMS.

IT HAS ONLY BEEN A COUPLE OF WEEKS SINCE MEMBERS OF THE WOMEN'S CAUCUS GATHERED TOGETHER TO WATCH NANCY PELOSI BE ELECTED THE FIRST WOMAN EVER TO HOLD THE POST OF SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE. WE WERE GATHERED IN SENATOR GLORIA ROMERO'S OFFICE – ONE OF THE BEST OFFICES IN THE CAPITOL, I MIGHT ADD – AND IT WASN'T LOST ON US, THAT AS WE WATCHED A WOMAN TAKE HER PLACE IN THE CONSTITUTIONAL LINE OF SUCCESSION TO THE PRESIDENCY, WE WERE SITTING IN THE OFFICE OF THE MAJORITY LEADER OF THE SENATE, ALSO A WOMAN.

AND THERE, IN OUR NATION'S CAPITOL, THE NEW SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE TOOK THE GAVEL, AND SHE WAS SURROUNDED BY FAMILY, BY CHILDREN, A POIGNANT IMAGE OF THE DEDICATION TO FAMILIES THAT WOMEN HAVE ALWAYS BROUGHT TO POLITICAL OFFICE.

WE HAVE MADE MUCH PROGRESS SINCE 1985, WHEN 15 WOMEN IN THE LEGISLATURE FOUNDED THE WOMEN'S CAUCUS. THAT'S 22 YEARS AGO ... AND THAT WAS 67 YEARS AFTER THE FIRST WOMAN WAS ELECTED TO THE STATE ASSEMBLY BACK IN 1918. AND THERE WERE NO WOMEN IN THE SENATE UNTIL 1976.

OKAY, SO THAT'S A LOT OF DATES AND A LOT OF NUMBERS. BUT WE'RE DEALING WITH POLITICS, AND POLITICS IS ALL ABOUT VOTES, AND VOTES ARE ALL ABOUT NUMBERS.

TODAY THE WOMEN'S CAUCUS – 10 STATE SENATORS AND 24 ASSEMBLY MEMBERS – IS MORE THAN TWICE AS LARGE AS IT WAS WHEN IT WAS FOUNDED. WE ARE 28 PERCENT OF THE LEGISLATURE. AND WE REFLECT THE DIVERSITY OF OUR STATE – WE ARE LATINA, WE ARE ASIAN-PACIFIC ISLANDER, WE ARE AFRICAN-AMERICAN AND WE ARE CAUCASIAN. WE ARE MAJORITY LEADERS. WE ARE COMMITTEE CHAIRS, VICE CHAIRS, AND CAUCUS CHAIRS.

FORMER SENATOR DEBRA BOWEN, AN ALUMNUS OF OUR CAUCUS, IS NOW THE SECRETARY OF STATE, THE ONLY WOMAN TO HOLD A STATEWIDE CONSTITUTIONAL OFFICE. AND I HOPE THAT HER MOVE FROM THE LEGISLATURE TO STATEWIDE OFFICE IS ONE THAT MANY OTHER WOMEN WILL MAKE IN THE COMING YEARS.

BUT HOW DOES ALL OF THIS MATTER? AND WHY SHOULD IT MATTER TO YOU, AND TO THE WORKING FAMILIES OF THIS STATE?

I ALWAYS POINT TO TWO REASONS FOR VOTING FOR WOMEN AND HAVING MORE WOMEN IN OFFICE. FIRST, IT'S JUST PLAIN EQUITY. SECOND, RESEARCH SHOWS THAT MORE WOMEN IN OFFICE MEANS A GREATER FOCUS ON PUBLIC POLICY THAT IMPACTS THE LIVES OF WOMEN, FAMILIES AND CHILDREN.

STUDIES BY THE CENTER FOR AMERICAN WOMEN AND POLITICS HAVE SHOWN THAT:

- WOMEN ARE MORE LIKELY TO GIVE PRIORITY TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS POLICIES; THEY ARE ALSO MORE LIKELY TO GIVE PRIORITY TO PUBLIC POLICIES RELATED TO WOMEN'S TRADITIONAL ROLES AS CAREGIVERS IN THE FAMILY AND SOCIETY.

- WOMEN PUBLIC OFFICIALS ARE MORE ACTIVE ON WOMEN’S RIGHTS LEGISLATION, AND
- WOMEN PUBLIC OFFICIALS ARE MORE FEMINIST AND MORE LIBERAL IN THEIR ATTITUDES ON MAJOR PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES, LIKE HEALTH CARE, CHILDCARE, EDUCATION AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

IN SHORT, WOMEN IN THE LEGISLATURE ARE MORE LIKELY TO PROTECT AND FOSTER THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.

THIS IS CERTAINLY TRUE IN CALIFORNIA WHERE WOMEN LEGISLATORS – AND THE WOMEN’S LEGISLATIVE CAUCUS -- HAVE OFTEN CHAMPIONED NEW POLICIES TO SUPPORT WOMEN, FAMILIES AND CHILDREN.

- THE WOMEN’S CAUCUS HAS CONSISTENTLY PLAYED A CRITICAL AND INFLUENTIAL ROLE IN MAINTAINING CALIFORNIA’S PUBLIC CHILD CARE SYSTEM;
- SENATOR SHEILA KUEHL LED THE WAY IN PASSING THE FIRST PAID FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE POLICY IN THE COUNTRY.
- FORMER SENATOR MARTHA ESCUTIA LED THE WAY IN FIGHTING JUNK FOOD IN SCHOOLS.
- THE WOMEN’S CAUCUS HAS HELD HEARINGS AND SHINED A SPOTLIGHT ON THE PLIGHT OF WOMEN IN PRISON.

- LAST YEAR, THE CAUCUS WORKED TO ENSURE THAT THE OFFICE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE PLANNING IMPROVED ON THE TIMELINESS OF CHECKS BEING ISSUED TO RAPE CRISIS CENTERS THROUGHOUT THE STATE.

SO, WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? AS THE INCOMING CHAIR OF THE CALIFORNIA LEGISLATIVE WOMEN’S CAUCUS, I PLAN TO MAKE WORKING FAMILIES A TOP PRIORITY. THAT’S WHY I AM DELIGHTED TO BE AT THIS LUNCHEON, I’M DELIGHTED THAT *YOU* ARE AT THIS LUNCHEON, AND I AM PLEASED TO KNOW THAT THIS IS THE 5TH TIME THAT THE WORKING FAMILIES POLICY SUMMIT HAS BEEN HELD.

A NUMBER OF WORKING FAMILIES AGENDAS ARE OUT IN THE PUBLIC ARENA – AND CALIFORNIA CAN POINT TO MANY ACCOMPLISHMENTS THAT ALLOW US TO CHECK OFF POLICIES ON OUR LIST OF COMMITMENTS.

AS I MENTIONED EARLIER, WE ARE THE FIRST STATE IN THE NATION TO PUT IN PLACE A PAID FAMILY LEAVE POLICY THAT PROVIDES WORKERS WITH A MAXIMUM OF SIX WEEKS OF PARTIAL PAY EACH YEAR WHILE TAKING TIME OFF WORK TO BOND WITH A NEWBORN BABY, NEWLY ADOPTED OR FOSTER CHILD, OR TO CARE FOR A SERIOUSLY ILL PARENT, CHILD SPOUSE OR REGISTERED DOMESTIC PARTNER.

ON JANUARY 1, 2007, WE INCREASED THE MINIMUM WAGE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN FIVE YEARS, FROM \$6.75 TO \$7.50 AND IT WILL BE BUMPED TO \$8.00 BEGINNING 2008.

WE ARE ENGAGED IN A STATEWIDE DEBATE ABOUT HOW TO PROVIDE HEALTH CARE FOR ALL.

AT THE SAME TIME, OUR WORK IS CLEARLY NOT DONE. THE WOMEN'S CAUCUS WILL HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN IMPROVING THE LIVES OF WORKING FAMILIES IN THE COMING YEAR.

I BELIEVE IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE BE CLEAR ABOUT WHAT WE EXPECT FROM NEGOTIATIONS ON HEALTHCARE AND ON THE BUDGET. I BELIEVE WE, AS WOMEN, NEED TO LAY OUT OUR PRIORITIES FOR ALL TO SEE.

HERE ARE THE PRIORITIES THAT I WILL BE RECOMMENDING TO THE CAUCUS AT OUR MEETING AT THE END OF THIS MONTH.

HEALTH CARE FOR ALL

THE CAUCUS WILL BE ACTIVE PLAYERS IN THIS YEAR'S HEALTH CARE DEBATES. WE WILL ASSESS THE PROPOSALS ON THE TABLE AND DEVELOP A CAUCUS POSITION. AT MINIMUM, WE NEED TO END THIS YEAR BY PROVIDING HEALTH CARE FOR ALL OF OUR STATE'S CHILDREN.

THE BEST OUTCOME IS TO PROVIDE HEALTH CARE FOR *ALL* CALIFORNIANS.

CHILD CARE

THE CAUCUS WILL CONTINUE TO CHAMPION CHILD CARE AND MY OFFICE HAS BEEN IN TOUCH WITH THE KEY STATEWIDE CHILDCARE ORGANIZATIONS REGARDING POTENTIAL LEGISLATION. I FULLY ANTICIPATE THE CAUCUS TO CONTINUE ITS WORK ON THE CHILDCARE BUDGET AND LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS TO MAXIMIZE FUNDING AND EXPAND SERVICES.

PAID FAMILY LEAVE

OUR PAID FAMILY LEAVE POLICY IS IN PLACE, BUT IT IS UNDER-UTILIZED. ONLY 29% OF WORKERS HAVE HEARD OF PAID FAMILY LEAVE AND ONLY 49% OF NEW MOMS WHO TAKE 6 WEEKS OF PREGNANCY DISABILITY APPLIED FOR THE ADDITIONAL 6 WEEKS OF BONDING LEAVE UNDER THE PAID FAMILY LEAVE LAW.

AS WOMEN LEGISLATORS, WE NEED TO HELP EDUCATE THE PUBLIC ABOUT THIS EXISTING POLICY. I PLAN TO WORK WITH EMPLOYMENT DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT, THE PAID LEAVE COALITION AND MY COLLEAGUE SENATOR KUEHL TO BOOST PUBLIC AWARENESS ABOUT PAID FAMILY LEAVE.

SAFETY NET

MANY OF THE WORKING FAMILIES' AGENDAS FORGET ABOUT THE SAFETY NET. THIS YEAR THERE WILL BE GREAT DEBATES ABOUT CAL WORKS FUNDING, IN LARGE PART DUE TO CHANGES THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS MADE IN THE DEFICIT REDUCTION ACT AND THE GOVERNOR'S RECOMMENDATION TO FORGO A 4% COLA. THE CAUCUS WILL BE ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN THE CAL WORKS DEBATE, WORKING TO ENSURE THAT FAMILIES HAVE THE RESOURCES THEY NEED TO RE-ENTER THE WORKFORCE AND GAIN SELF SUFFICIENCY.

I KNOW THAT KATE KARPILOW SPOKE EARLIER ABOUT "CONNECTING THE DOTS." THAT IS RIGHT ON THE MARK. IF WE ARE GOING TO BE A STATE THAT TRULY SUPPORTS OUR WORKING FAMILIES, WE NEED TO HAVE AN AGENDA THAT NOT ONLY ADDRESSES HEALTH CARE, BUT ALSO PROVIDES CHILD CARE, GOOD SCHOOLS, SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS, A SAFETY NET – AND MORE.

THIS YEAR, I WILL ASK THE CALIFORNIA LEGISLATIVE WOMEN'S CAUCUS TO WORK TOWARDS ON HEALTH CARE FOR ALL, CHAMPION THE PUBLIC CHILD CARE SYSTEM, EDUCATE THE PUBLIC ABOUT PAID FAMILY LEAVE, AND SAFEGUARD OUR SAFETY NET THROUGH SUPPORTING ASSET BUILDING PROPOSALS.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT AND YOUR PARTNERSHIP.