

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN LAWYERS

Cathy Fleming, President 2006-2007

THE ROAD BEFORE US...

Greetings and welcome. Today we applaud the work of the past year and honor deserving recipients for their past efforts and achievements. It is a celebration for NAWL, its committees, board, sponsors and friends. It is a time to recognize publicly those people, firms, corporations and schools who sponsor our work and our programs all year. It is an appropriate time to thank our outgoing President, Lorraine Koc, for her tireless work, creative vision, and effective leadership.

We recall with gratitude those who paved the road behind us. We also must remember who travels on the road today and continue to pave a road that takes us all where we need to go.

This is an exciting time to be a lawyer traveling that road. Ever faster and improving technology has revolutionized the way we communicate, research and practice law. BlackBerry devices and cell phones enable us to juggle schedules and travel, giving flexibility as to where we are but at the price of permitting and increasing intrusion into our private lives. The internet has provided expansive access to information, whether one is a solo practitioner or part of a mega organization. Television and other media has made the world a much smaller place. Corporate America has become the poster child for ethics: both for what is good and what is bad. The “War on Terror” has challenged us and has focused worldwide attention on America’s commitment to civil liberties. Natural disasters—and instantaneous coverage—have highlighted the best and worst of human behavior and governmental responses.

Since the colonists formed our nation, American lawyers have been the leaders of the fight. Women have, in increasing numbers, joined and led the fight. NAWL members actively paved the road for women to practice law, to vote, and to hold public office. On those paved roads, women are judges, partners, lawmakers, cabinet members, chief legal officers and professors, albeit in smaller percentages than is proportionate or appropriate. Women have been and are Supreme Court Justices, Vice Presidential candidates, law school deans. Fifteen percent are currently partners in law firms and leaders in corporations.

The road before us is certain. My daughter will live to see a woman as Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court and a woman President of the United States. My granddaughter will not think that is unusual or historic. We will all see women as chief legal officers, law makers, policy makers and law firm partners in much larger numbers than today. The road ahead recognizes, rewards and demands true diversity.

Constance Baker Motley, the first African-American woman to serve as a federal judge, said, "Something which we think is impossible now is not impossible in another decade."

The National Association of Women Lawyers agrees.

As the incoming President of NAWL, I look forward to the day when no one can be described as "the first woman" anything. I look forward to paving our road... together.

Cathy Fleming, President 2006-2007