

**Remarks of the Honorable Christine Todd Whitman  
at the  
New Jersey State Bar Association's  
Women in the Profession Section  
New Brunswick, New Jersey**

**October 14, 2014**

Thank you for that kind introduction. It's a pleasure to be with you this morning.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about some of the obstacles women face in getting ahead in male-dominated professions and some of the obligations women have to help one another get ahead.

But before I get to that, I wanted to share with you a greeting card I came across recently when I was looking for a get-well card for a friend.

On the front of the card is drawing of a pleasant, average looking woman, seated in a chair, dispensing get-well advice. The card reads: "As you're recovering, just relax – Put your feet up ... Have people bring you things... You know, pretend you're a man."

There's more than a kernel of truth in that sentiment. I have found, over the course of my career, that women, as a rule, have to work harder and are judged by more rigorous standards than are their male counterparts. And nothing is just given to us.

That's certainly true in politics and, from speaking with women in the legal profession; it appears to be true in the legal profession.

Indeed, I think it's fair to say that almost every woman in America today who has reached the top rungs of any historically male-dominated profession has had to fight extra hard to get where they are. They have had to overcome long-standing biases, fight outright and subtle discrimination, endure the doubters and at times conquer self-doubt. But fortunately, few them have had to do it alone.

I was discouraged to read in the most recent report by the ABA's Commission on Women in the Profession that although women make up 34 percent of the nation's lawyers, and about half of the women who finish law school, in private practice women represent just 20 percent of partners and only 17 percent of equity partners. In the nation's 200 largest law firms, just four percent of the managing partners are women.

In corporate America, things are about the same. In the Fortune 500, just 21 percent of corporate general counsels are women. And if one takes a wider look, in the Fortune 1,000, only about 17 percent of those companies' general counsels are women.

And the story is much the same in the political arena. There are only five women governors in the United States. Women hold only about 25 percent of state legislative seats. And women comprise just 18 percent of the Congress.

It is, of course, tempting to draw a direct correlation between the paucity of women in Congress and the overall effectiveness of Congress, but that might be -- it might be -- a cheap shot, so I won't make that assertion.

If my own experience is any guide, I know that the journey to the top is pretty much impossible without a strong network of people who can help you along the way. It's an indispensable ingredient to success.

The men have their old boys' network; we need something comparable. I know I wouldn't call it an "old girls' network," but it's not what we call it that's important, it's who we're able to call on that counts.

When I was starting out in the late 1960s, women were only just making their way back into the work force. I say back into the workforce because I believe the roots of the modern women's area go back to World War II. As millions of men joined the service, women entered the civilian workforce in numbers never before seen.

When the war was over, the vast majority of those women went back to their homes. But they had tasted the larger world outside, and they didn't want their daughters to have to wait for another world war before they got that same chance.

While my own mother wasn't employed outside the home, both she and her mother were incredibly strong women. Neither one of them ever felt the least bit constrained by what society thought of as a "woman's place." And I have to say my father never did either.

I can still vividly recall being taught how to fly fish by my father. He expected me to be able to cast a line and set a hook just as well as my brothers and he did. Both my parents instilled in me the belief that I could succeed at anything that I had the drive and talent to achieve. I never had the sense that my horizons were limited.

That sense of confidence is probably why it took me a long time to fully understand and recognize the constraints others wanted to place on me in my career because I was a woman.

During my time as governor, I was often asked, "What's it like to be a woman governor -- how is it different?" My usual response was probably too casual -- "I don't know, I've never been a male governor." My thinking always was, my gender isn't something I can do anything about -- well, I guess in this day and age, it is -- but I never really confronted just how much of a difference it made.

It wasn't until I had been out of public office for a few years, however, that I had a chance to reflect. There's no doubt that the fact that I wasn't "one of the boys" made some things harder than they should have been.

I don't say that as an excuse, but simply as an observation.

Let me tell you a couple of stories that illustrate that.

Shortly after I graduated from college, I landed my first job in politics – as a political staffer at the Republican National Committee in Washington. Apparently back in 1969, the idea of a young woman taking such a job struck many in the political establishment as a bit of a novelty.

A few weeks after I started at the RNC, the newsletter of the New Jersey Republican Committee carried a little blurb about my new job. I think they wrote about it because my father had only recently retired as state party chairman.

They said: "Good luck and good learning to Chris Todd who is doing her political thing at National Headquarters where she is an assistant to the first assistant.... She's papa bear's pretty bundle of charm, wit, and political savvy."

I must admit, the condescending tone of that blurb still gets under my skin, just a little bit. I know for sure that if it had been one of my brothers going to Washington, they wouldn't have called him papa bear's bundle of anything. They would have called him the heir apparent or something like that.

Yet even 25 years later, when I was running for governor, people were still writing about my appearance, as if I was running for Prom Queen instead of chief executive of a state of 8 million people. In fact, more than one male political reporter seemed to use my candidacy to discover their long suppressed inner fashion reporter.

I recall one article, where a male journalist wrote that I looked "too aristocratic, too serene in her tweed jacket and gold jewelry, every hair on her head neatly in place" to connect with middle class voters. Another called me Tom Kean in pearls.

I don't recall anyone ever writing that my opponent wore, for example, "yet another boring suit with a starched white shirt and predictable red tie." And I've never heard any male politician called, "Christie Whitman with cufflinks."

After I won that election, becoming the first person ever to defeat an incumbent governor in a New Jersey general election, one of the goals I set for myself was to attract as many talented women to my administration as I could find.

By the time I left office, I had appointed the first women gubernatorial chief of staff, the first woman attorney general, the first woman chief justice of our state Supreme

Court, while also appointing scores more women to jobs usually held by men, including top cabinet offices and numerous judicial spots.

All of these women were highly qualified and experienced. Yet it didn't take long before my staff started to hear rumblings from some of the men in the legislature. Various members were calling the governor's office the "Estrogen Palace."

I never reciprocated by calling their chambers the "Testosterone Castle." Of course, having negotiated with them for seven years, that probably would have been an exaggeration anyway.

One of the raps on women, still, is that we're not tough enough to play hardball, whether in the law, in business or in politics. And there's no doubt that success in every competitive field requires toughness.

But toughness comes in many guises. So the real question we face is not, "Should we be tough," but is rather, "How do we manifest that toughness; how do we act tough without playing right into stereotypes that can diminish our effectiveness."

In my career, I've found the best way to exhibit toughness is to have a clear sense of your objectives and goals; a clear plan for advancing them; and a tireless commitment to achieving them. Knowing what you want to accomplish, and then sticking to your guns, is the true measure of toughness.

Toughness can exhibit itself in many ways, and in my experience, the more subtle ways are often the most effective. I've made it a point, for example, to always control my temper, no matter how angry or frustrated I got.

By control, I don't mean suppress. I think there are far more effective ways to let people know you're not pleased with things than yelling at them. We don't have to – and we shouldn't – adopt the worst behaviors of some men to prove we're as tough as they are.

The fact remains, however, that with all the progress women have made, we remain grossly underrepresented in the corridors of political power in boardrooms, in C suites, and in partners meetings at law firms of all sizes.

It's safe to say that we are much more carefully scrutinized and held to a much higher standard of performance than our male counterparts.

I don't really mind that – I believe it's important to always strive for excellence. But there's no doubt that there are times when we are criticized for things that would be overlooked if any man did them.

I'm a fan of American musicals, and as I've been thinking about this question recently, a song from the Broadway musical, "Avenue Q" keeps running through my mind. It's called "Everyone's A Little Bit Racist."

There's a line that goes – and don't worry, I'm not going to sing it – "Maybe it's a fact/ we should all face/ everyone makes judgments/ based on race."

Here's a variation on that line: "Maybe it's a fact /we should all remember/ everyone makes judgments/ based on gender."

I wonder if perhaps we could move further ahead than we have if all of us admitted that maybe we are all just a little bit sexist. Let's face it, who among us has not generalized about the men in our profession? In fact, I've done here today.

We all have our prejudices – all of us. They may not be about race or gender; they might be about where one went to school, what one does for leisure, how much one weighs, who one's parents were, what kind of accent one speaks with – the list goes on and on.

Maybe all of us – men and women – need to admit that we still make judgments about people based on characteristics that really have nothing to do with a person's ability.

Perhaps we need to be more honest with ourselves about relying on superficialities before we even consider a person's intelligence, their experience, their character, their vision, their commitment, and their judgment.

That's why I always share with audiences like this one of my favorite quotes – it's from Maureen Reagan, Ronald Reagan's first born. She said, "I will feel equality has arrived when we can elect to office women who are as unqualified as some of the men who are already there."

What Maureen meant, of course, is we will know sexism is behind us when a woman won't have to be a superstar before she's able to get ahead of even the most mediocre man.

As I said a few minutes ago, all of us, as women, face a unique set of challenges in our individual efforts to assume our rightful places in the world. But I'm also here to tell you that the challenges are not insurmountable and that the price is a price worth paying.

That being said, I also believe that there's no such thing as Superwoman. If you are a wife or a mother or are in any way responsible for another person in your life, you will inevitably confront those times when you are torn between conflicting priorities.

I had plenty of nights when I was kept awake worrying about whether I was doing the right thing by my family or my job.

Yet because I have a husband who has been enormously supportive of my career – and two wonderful kids who showed great patience and support – there were fewer of those nights than one might think.

That's because I've worked hard to strike the balance that works for me. And I've never once forgotten that as fulfilling as I have found my career, only one thing always has been and always will be there for me – my family.

Being with you today gives me great confidence about the future and women's place in it. In the several decades since I graduated from college, women have been struggling to find their place in America's legal, corporate, and political worlds. It hasn't always been a smooth or straight path ahead. But there has been consistent forward progress, for the most part.

When my daughter and son-in-law made me a grandmother for the first time a few years ago I was filled, of course, with the sense of joy and pride known only to grandparents. But I was also filled with hope – hope that when my grandsons grow up, the presence of women as colleagues and as bosses will be so commonplace that they will wonder why it was ever even an issue.

The women in this room – and your colleagues wherever you work – are the ones who can make that hope a reality. Use opportunities like this to make the contacts, build the networks, and achieve that goal. And because you will, my grandchildren will be able to live in a society that fully values, respects, and admires women and all they have to offer.

Thank you.