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## Celebrating Women's Suffrage 100 Years Later

🕒 April 27, 2017 👤 Meg Tohill 📁 News 💬 0

100 years after securing the right to vote in New York, women from all over the state agree that there is still work to be done in achieving women's equality. On Friday, April 21 and Saturday, April 22, suffragists made their voices heard at "Women in Politics: Past, Present & Future," a conference commemorating the centennial of women's suffrage in New York State (NYS).

The conference was supported, in part, by funds from the SUNY New Paltz Office of Academic Affairs, the NYS Women's Suffrage Commission, the NYS Legislative Women's Caucus and Friends of the Benjamin Center.

The collaborative project was made accessible by various organizations: The Benjamin Center, the SUNY New Paltz Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies program, the university's departments of history, political science and sociology, the FDR Presidential Library and Museum, Hudson River Valley Greenway, League of Women Voters of NYS and the Rockefeller Institute of Government.

At approximately 2 p.m. Friday afternoon, attendees were invited to explore FDR Presidential Library and Museum. This was followed by event coordinators ushering visitors into the Milstein Auditorium

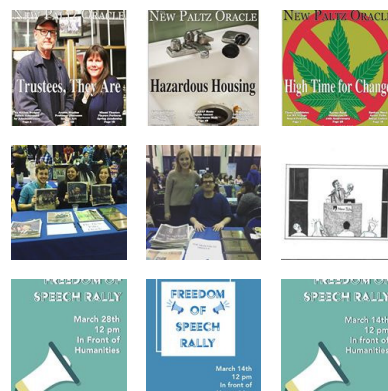
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where they received a commemorative coin designed by students enrolled in the metalworking department of SUNY New Paltz and a greeting from Paul Sparrow, the director of the museum. Sparrow's regards were followed by SUNY New Paltz History deputy chair Dr. Susan Lewis, who set the theme of the night by reflecting back on 1917.

"Have you ever heard anybody say 'women got the vote?'" Lewis prompted the audience. "They didn't 'get' anything; they won the vote."

Lewis noted that the mood of the times are constantly changing, that by the time women had won the vote nationwide, suffragists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were already dead, their fight had always been for the future generations.

Introduced shortly after by Marissa Shorenstein, president of AT&T for New York State, was U.S. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand.

Gillibrand's arrival, wildly anticipated, was met with a standing ovation.

She quickly began discussing how exciting it was for her to be back in her old congressional district.

"I'm very grateful for everyone here who will make sure that everyone in the state can celebrate suffrage correctly," she said. "I want to thank all of you here to teach the next generation how to fight for what you believe in."

Gillibrand prefaced her sentiments by sharing her favorite story of Susan B. Anthony's efforts in fighting for suffrage. Telling the tale of Anthony who illegally voted in 1872, Gillibrand lamented how easily it is to forget.

"People don't remember this. A lot of people easily forget that women didn't always have the right to vote," she said.

"America will never reach its full potential until every girl reaches hers; women are still fighting for basic rights. Women are now dominating fields that used to be filled predominantly by males but as much as our workforce has changed in the last few decades, our

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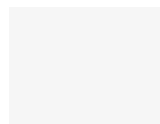
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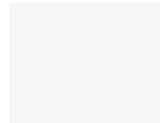
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### Celebrating Women's Suffrage 100 Years Later

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workplace policies are lacking,” Gillibrand stated.

Gillibrand spoke about lack of paid leave for women with children, the rate of women in the country who are employed as minimum wage workers and a continued lack of equal work for equal pay.

Gillibrand took a moment to muse with her audience, “Imagine we had a woman president.”

She continued her speech by discussing her experience at the Women’s March back in January.

“It was truly one of the most inspiring things I have ever witnessed; my personal favorite sign that I saw was a grandmother holding a poster that said, ‘I can’t believe I’m still doing this,’” Gillibrand said.

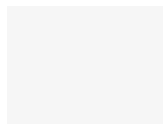
“You are the suffragists of today. In 100 years, what will they say about us? What will they think about us?” she asked her audience.

Gillibrand finished her sentiments by quoting Anthony: “Failure is impossible.”

To further put the night’s topic into perspective, director of research and evaluation at the Benjamin Center Dr. Eve Waltermaurer presented the View on Women (VOW) Poll New York State. The poll surveyed 1,050 randomly selected adults shortly after the 2016 presidential election. It is the first of its kind to be a comprehensive, single source metric focusing specifically on social perceptions of women, and the gender gaps that remain in the legal, political, social, economic and private spheres.

A specific point of contention for both Waltermaurer and the audience were the statistics involving participants who identified as feminists and those who did not. A large sum, while believing that women and men should be seen as equal, stated that they did not identify as a feminist.

“We have established this idea of what feminism is and we often siphon our causes; early feminism excluded women of color and women of low income,” Waltermaurer said. “People hold onto the early values without realizing it has become all inclusive. There’s a lot of work to be done in order to get the word out.”



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The poll was followed by a panel consisting of State Sen. Marisol Alcantara, Rensselaer County Executive Kathleen Jimino, Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan and former speaker of the New York City Council Christine Quinn. The panel, moderated by Capital Tonight host Liz Benjamin, covered everything from struggling with racial prejudice, to how a female politician is “expected” to act and dress.

The brief cocktail reception was paired with speeches and a toast from Chief Executive officer of the League of Women Voters of the US Dr. Wylecia Wiggs Harris, President of the League of Women Voters of NYS Dare Thompson and Assemblymember of District 106 Didi Barrett.

Attendees were then encouraged to enter the Multipurpose room for dinner, which was followed by the keynote address at 8 p.m. The address, entitled “Eleanor Roosevelt, the Politician, and Woman Suffrage: A Conversation with Allida Black and Anne Lewis,” covered the Eleanor Roosevelt letters, proving the concept that Roosevelt herself had put in large efforts in gaining equality for all women, including women of color and of low income, much unlike Stanton and Anthony.

The next morning at 8 a.m. visitors filed into the Lecture Center at SUNY New Paltz to be greeted by students from the campus who were enrolled in two classes on campus: Women Win the Vote and Women in Politics. The students had set up and presented projects that represented statistics regarding females in positions of power worldwide.

At 8:30 a.m. participants of the conference listened to Lieutenant Gov. Kathy Hocol.

Hocol's sentiments continued the theme of the event. “We just aren't there yet,” she said.

“We are a little better off in New York: our pay gap is slightly smaller than that of other states, but why is there a gap at all?” Hocol questioned.

Divulging her own personal doubts in her ability to hold a position of power, Hocol told the audience of how she weighed the pros and cons of running for Congress.

"I had asked my daughter what she thought. She was looking at me to see if I had the guts to do something that was seemingly impossible. I calculated the time away from family and I stopped myself and said 'No, I need to send a message to this little girl,'" she said. "It is our responsibility to send the message to younger generations that anything is possible."

Hocul's speech was followed by concurrent panel sessions: "1917: How Did Women Win the Vote in New York State," "Women in Government Today," "After the Vote: Women in Social and Political Movements" and "The Limits of Suffrage in a Liberal Democracy."

Lunch followed shortly after and led into the keynote address: "Which Way Forward? Freedom Organizing in the 21st century" which was presented by black feminist author and activist Barbara Smith. The event was finished off with one last panel: "Women in New York State: The Unfinished Agenda" which approached the burgeoning question – what is there left to do?

For those who were interested, Mohonk Mountain House provided a K-12 teacher workshop that addressed incorporating women's political history into the curriculum.

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