



NRC NEWS

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**REMARKS BY
RICHARD A. MESERVE
CHAIRMAN
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AT THE
WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH PROGRAM
10:30 A.M. TUESDAY, MARCH 21, 2000
NRC AUDITORIUM**

Good Morning, ladies and gentlemen. I am pleased to welcome you to NRC's Women's History Month program and to participate with you in this celebration of women's history, accomplishments, and struggle for equality.

As Barbara Williams noted a moment ago, our theme for Women's History 2000 is "Extraordinary Century - Now Imagine the Future." By nearly any standard, the 20th century was indeed an extraordinary time of change, particularly for those who are among the disadvantaged in society. When sufficient time has elapsed for historians to develop an objective evaluation of the major trends and impacts of the 20th century, the revolutionary change in the status of women worldwide, and particularly in America, may well be the hallmark of the past 100 years and the most important influence on our society in the new millennium.

The 20th Century certainly did not start out this way. To put the past century in perspective, imagine for a moment that it is March 21, 1900. William McKinley is President, and the Nation is once again focused on domestic issues after the successful conclusion of the Spanish-American War. It is the beginning of the Progressive Era. Nevertheless, although a women's movement has existed for nearly 30 years, only the women of Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Idaho have been granted full voting rights. The status of women is defined by their role in the family and a lack of broad access to education and work. American society expects women to be oriented toward marriage and homemaking. Working women are relatively few, mostly poor, and working in agriculture or menial jobs. At the dawn of the 20th Century, there would be little reason to believe that the next 100 years will be much different for women than the last 100 years.

Fifty years later, things have changed, but the impact of change is not yet noticeable. It is March 21, 1950. Harry Truman is President, and while the Nation is at peace, the Cold War has already begun and the Korean War is a scant three months away. Women have entered the workforce in large numbers during two world wars, but have generally not remained employed once hostilities ended. A baby boom is in progress, but it will not last long. Societal expectations for women are still oriented toward the family and home, although a substantial number of women are seeking college degrees or are in the workforce. Women have been enfranchised for over 30 years, but without noticeable impact. Only one woman holds a seat in the U.S. Senate - Margaret Chase Smith of Maine. Although she will become one of the most powerful figures in Congress in the years ahead and will be the first woman to compete for her party's nomination for President 14 years later, her continual reelection to office is considered an anomaly even by women. As someone who grew up in New England, I suspect that her status was viewed generally as a product of Downeast eccentricity. From the perspective of 1950, we would conclude that while progress in the advancement of women has been made, the pace is glacial.

This morning, it is March 21, 2000. From the perspective of the new century, a quiet revolution seems to have occurred. Spurred by the civil rights movement and other developments in the tumultuous 60s, women have successfully pressed their case for equal treatment both in law and in fact. Today, women continue to constitute the majority of the U.S. population. Since 1990, they have made up the majority of enrolled college students at all levels in both full- and part-time categories. And in the 25-35 age cohort, they are more likely than male contemporaries to have a high school diploma and a bachelor's degree. There are now nearly 62 million working women in the U.S., which is nearly 46% of the total labor force; 30% of these women are either managers or professionals. Since the beginning of the 1990s, women have increasingly sought and won elective office at all levels. They now constitute 11.7 % of the House of Representatives and 9% of the Senate. Since 1991, the number of women in the full-time judiciary has increased by 65%. In short, the force of change has accelerated.

What of the future? Although our theme invites us to imagine the future, the outlines of that future seem clear. Among the most important signs is the permanent change in American society's expectations concerning women. We see a continuing shift away from family and the home and toward the workplace, perhaps with a countervailing shift in the roles of men. We also see continuing high rates of enrollment of women in colleges and universities, which positions women well in an economy that is increasingly based on knowledge. These systemic changes will continue to ensure that the "revolution" in the status of women in the 20th century continues on in the 21st. The changes give us hope that in the 21st century, gender will no longer determine whether an individual can reach his or her full potential. We can see the day when the value of any individual will be determined solely by ability and character. As a father of two daughters, I hope that that day is soon upon us.

Thank you.

Now I have the pleasure to introduce our guest speaker for today's observance. Ms. Paula Nelson, entrepreneur and best-selling author, is well known to millions as a result of her commentary on

CNN Business News and the Today show. Before she was thirty, she co-founded three electronics companies and wrote the Joy of Money, a book on excellence and success, and dedicated to women's economic and financial freedom. The book sold over 500,000 copies and is one of four she wrote on the subject.

In 1982, Ms. Nelson wrote Where to Get Money for Everything, a 300-page book packed with money-making wisdom on everything from home financing to venture capital. In 1985, she authored Paula Nelson's Guide to Getting Rich, which shares ten concepts for tapping your economic opportunity. Her latest book, Soar with your Strengths, shows how most successful leaders and educators achieve excellence by focusing on strengths and managing weaknesses. The Chicago Sun Times called Ms. Nelson "a corporate whiz kid and an articulate advocate of financial freedom" and Barron's has called her "the leading exponent of the power of positive thinking school of finance."

Please join me in welcoming Paula Nelson.