

NC Women Matter (3-10-12) Alma S. Adams, PhD.

To the distinguished coalition of movers, shapers and shakers in this room, ladies and gentlemen welcome and good morning.

I bring greetings from the 58th House district (where you are right now) and the 60,000 plus residents I have been privileged to represent in the North Carolina House for the past 9 ½ terms. I join my colleague Dr. Valerie Johnson in welcoming each of you to Bennett College and bring greetings on behalf of our president Dr. Julianne Malveaux.

“In politics if you want something said ask a man; but if you want something done ask a woman”. (Margaret Thatcher)

I am delighted to be here; but I am more delighted that this room is filled with doers today; because individually we can each change something but collectively if we put our minds to it, we can change everything.

The power is in the numbers and ladies we’ve got those.

Women make up the majority of the population in our state and nation and those numbers are continuing to climb.

Women don’t take anything for granted, including the right to vote.

Although we’ve had that right for less than a century, we exercise it in much greater numbers and greater percentages than men.

In recent elections voter turnout rates for women have equaled or exceeded turnout rates for men.

Women, who constitute more than half the population, have cast between four and seven million more votes than men in recent elections.

In every presidential election since 1980 the proportion of female adults who voted exceeded the proportion of male adults who voted.

So why aren’t things any better for us than they are and why are we here?

My take on it is we (women) have not been fully engaged enough in this process as we should have been.

As a result- the issues (our issues- those things we care about) many of them have not received satisfactory attention; some still lying on the table-- because we’ve been absent from the total process.

All issues are our issues and everything about any thing (from street lights, to the environment, to finances and budgets, equal pay for equal work, to our health care and reproductive rights , our families, our children’s education—they all matter to us as women.

Yes, North Carolina Women matter and the issues in our state impacting everybody matter to us.

To the organizers of this event; thank you for the value that you have placed on the big “N” word-- Networking.

Because creating a strong net that works for all of us is truly what making a difference is all about and it is how you do make that difference.

You see in spite of whatever difference exists among us around party, race or ethnicity, or religion-- we all have one thing in common --our gender and there is no D or R on it either, only a big “G”—Gender.

So our coming together today to create a net for women so we can truly make the net work for us (because the net won’t work if there is a hole in it) is truly the beginning of creating the change that we want to see and the change we need to see.

I know it is not a secret but in case you didn’t know it ladies, all things are political.

From the time you’re born to the time you die somebody will make a decision for and about you; most times without you.

So you need to either be in a position to make those decisions for yourselves (and run or office and I hope you will); or you need to be able to control those individuals who make those decisions on your behalf.

To do less than that—to be deliberately absent from this process puts your fate in the hands of others who may not know about you, who can’t identify with you; who may not even care about you and what you care about, what you need or what you want.

Having a voice—really having a voice ladies and being heard is all about power and it is about your voice being at the table (not just in the door or in the room) but both feet under the table throughout the process.

It seems simple enough to me. If you help deliver the vote; somebody ought to be delivering something to you.

It’s all about power;

And power is what makes the difference in lives and communities.

The first thing you have to understand about power and how to get it is you don’t ask someone how to get it where it is or can you have it.

You take it and once you’ve taken it you use it.

This is an important year in our nation and in our state and North Carolina Women Matter.

The only way others (mostly men who absorb the power most of the time because we give it to them with our vote and require nothing in return—no accountability) will respect us as the contributors we know we are- is for women to be actively engaged in the political process and demand, I said DEMAND TO BE HEARD.

I would guess that everybody in this room is probably registered to vote. I hope so.

But you know it’s not enough just to be registered to vote.

I tell my students (those Voting Bennett Belles) that carrying around a voter registration card means absolutely nothing if you don't use it;

Because if you're registered and you don't vote you are worse than the person who is not registered.

So ladies if you're registered you must vote because if you don't vote you won't be counted and if you're not counted ladies-guess what? You won't be heard.

You have another responsibility too and that is to make sure you participate in helping to empower other women (young and old) so they know what the issues are, educated on them and the candidates so they cease to become voiceless.

Some have said there is a War on Women and you know I believe it.

I am a witness.

I serve in the North Carolina House and there is a mean, mean spirit in the House right now that has a national demeanor as well.

Just look around; as the world marks the 101st International Women's Day and as we mark the beginning of Women's History month more and more American Women are finding their own health under rhetorical and legislative attack in the halls of Congress, in state after state and in North Carolina too.

From attempts to defund organizations (like Planned Parenthood) that provide women with basic health services that for many women is the only health care they have; to placing intrusive and often humiliating obstacles before women exercising their right to choose; to restricting access to contraception; to the reduction of child care subsidies by 9 million in our state (14%); to cuts for Rape Crisis Center programs, to the elimination of thousands of jobs for teachers and state employees- where women make up 58% of those jobs.

The conditions are dismal and bleak and sunshine does not appear to be on the horizon.

Things are not likely to improve ladies if each of us is not involved.

All politics are local.

You must be involved first in the statewide elections in North Carolina which begin with the May 8th Primaries and then national elections this November 6th.

I want to close today by reminding each of you that the objects in the mirror are closer than they appear—slow down and look carefully.

If we are not involved, truly involved by voting and making sure others do as well, by holding others accountable (including elected officials both men and women) who get amnesia and forget how they got to sit where they sit and who continue to participate in this cruel and destructive war fare, voting against women's rights, disrespecting who we are and what we bring to the table; then I say ladies—SHAME, SHAME ON US!