

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great personal as well as professional satisfaction to attend this Forum, the first of its kind to be organized and conducted by a multi-party “partnership” of women and men dedicated to encouraging women’s participation in politics and governance.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank the International Republican Institute for its support and Ambassador Ellen Sauerbrey for her leadership and contribution to improving the status of women around the world – and for accepting the invitation to participate in this landmark event.

I am awed by the wealth of talent and experience represented in this room today. Since I am neither an expert on women in Mongolia nor an experienced politician, I am somewhat at a loss to know what I can contribute to this Forum. But I am a woman and career diplomat. That should qualify me to make a few observations, based on my own experience.

Women in America have made great strides in the past 25 years in “opening the door” (as Senator Feinstein said) for women who are committed to public service through both appointed and elected office. When I embarked on my career with the State Department in 1981:

- There were no female Justices among the 9 members of the US Supreme Court; today there are two.
- There was only one woman among the 100 members of the US Senate; today there are 14.
- No woman had served as Secretary of State; as of today, two of the last three people to hold that office have been women.

It has not been easy and it has taken time to push open those doors. The gradual inclusion of women in political and corporate life was largely a reflection of the growing realization by all Americans – men and women -- that we could not claim to be a mature

democracy or to remain a world leader if we systematically excluded more than 50 percent of our citizens from positions of authority and influence.

It was not so long ago – until 1972 in fact – when women diplomats who married were required to resign. And it was not until 1980 that a US Federal court ruled that the State Department “discriminated” against women and required it to revise its recruitment, assignment and promotion policies to ensure fair and equitable treatment for women. Today, women represent almost 30% of the career diplomatic officer corps at all grade levels, including at the most senior grades. As the first woman ambassador to represent the United States in Mongolia, I am among those women who today head a quarter of our embassies around the world.

From my own experience, I would attribute the most significant gains over the past 30 or more years to concerted and organized lobbying and to collective legal action -- by women on behalf of women. Beginning with the 1960s civil rights movement, women benefited from the general “affirmative action” programs that opened up educational and employment opportunities to minorities. But I think the historical record will show that the real catalyst for change came from women themselves: women who had the organizational skills, courage, ability and persistence to challenge the status quo through the electoral system and in the courts.

But while we have succeeded in opening the door for women, stepping through that door presents another challenge. Today, in the United States there is a puzzling decrease in the number of women who seek elected office. Why is this? Recent studies of current trends seem to indicate that women who run for office are less likely than their male counterparts to consider politics a profession and to make a professional commitment. In other words, women are not taking advantage of the opportunity. Rather, women tend to enter politics and seek elected office only after pursuing other careers and only after being encouraged by friends, mentors or family to do so. These studies suggest that the future for women in government and politics will depend in large part on the active efforts by political parties and non-governmental organizations to seek out, recruit, train,

and financially support capable and aspiring women for both elected and appointed public office.

American women have made great progress in overcoming and removing barrier to their participation in politics and government, but they still lag behind their counterparts in many other democracies in this regard. I do believe, however, that there is much in the American experience, both in the setbacks/failures as well as the successes, which can serve as models or “lessons learned” for Mongolia. The workshops and presentations today and tomorrow will provide an opportunity to you to form the personal and professional networks and to shape the approach and policies that will enable you to make women’s participation “the norm not the exception.” I would hope that were I to return to Mongolia in 10 years’ time, that I would find many more of you here today serving the public as elected or appointed officials at the local as well as national levels.

My best wishes to all the participants for a productive Forum. This is a significant step forward for Mongolia’s democratic reform process and one that will ultimately benefit all of the Mongolian people.