

Thank you very much for attending tonight's event. On behalf of the Women & Politics Institute, the Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies, the School of Public Affairs, and American University, I'd like to welcome you this evening. I'm Jennifer Lawless, the Director of the Women & Politics Institute. And I am thrilled to present to you the incredible panel we assembled tonight to celebrate Women's History Month.

Our celebration is one of many going on around the country this month. Two weeks ago, in fact, Saturday Night Live debuted a new song, entitled "Good Job Women," to celebrate what they termed "Women's Herstory Month." Let me just read you a brief excerpt:

Betsy Ross made a flag.
Rosa Parks sat on a bus.
Nancy Pelosi: government.
Emily Dickinson: books.
Good job women. Good job women.
Enjoy the month of March because that's all you get.

Comedy Central has been ushering in the festivities for years. In 1999, Jon Stewart recognized women's contributions each Th-HERS-day in March. In March of 2006, Stephen Colbert apologized for mentioning Women's History Month a total of "never." Last year, Jay Leno celebrated Women's History Month with a Jaywalking segment in which a woman on the street identified Betsy Ross as the "woman who was knitting the quilt while riding the bus in the 1950s." And this year, the Daily Show recognized "The 7 Greatest White Men of Women's History," including Phil Donahue, who with "little more than some moxie and hard work, created a television template that Oprah Winfrey would mimic to become one of the richest women on the planet," as well as Walter

Mondale, a “visionary Democrat had the courage to look traditional biases in the face and ask, ‘Eh, why not?’”

Despite these important celebrations and alerts to women’s achievements, I should note that – to be perfectly honest – I’m a little bit “anti-Women’s History Month.” You’re stunned, I’m sure. How can the Director of the Women & Politics Institute be anti-Women’s History Month? Let me very briefly provide you with a little bit of background information.

It is impossible to deny the substantial progress women have recently made in government and politics. Over the course of the last 30 years alone, the number of women in Congress has more than tripled. Nancy Pelosi is the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Secretary of State and former U.S. Senator, Hillary Rodham Clinton, received 18 million votes in her 2008 bid for the presidency. Former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin appeared on the national ticket as Republican presidential candidate John McCain’s running mate. And we’ve reached a point in American politics when women fare as well as their male counterparts on Election Day, both in terms of vote totals and fundraising receipts.

But despite these stories of political success, the U.S. still ranks 85th worldwide in the percentage of women serving in the national legislature. When the 111th Congress convened in January 2009, 83 percent of its members were men. Three-quarters of statewide elected officials and state legislators are men. Men occupy the governor’s

mansion in 44 of the 50 states, and they run City Hall in 90 of the 100 largest cities across the country.

I'm a little anti-Women's History Month because these numbers suggest that we need far more than a month to call attention to the glaring gender disparities in our political institutions!

Of course, we didn't even always have the month. In fact, prior to the 1970s, the topic of women in politics was – pretty much – completely missing from the public's consciousness. It wasn't until 1978 that any formal recognition of women's history became part of the public sphere discussion. That year, the Education Task Force of the Sonoma County, California Commission on the Status of Women initiated a "Women's History Week." When the celebration met a positive response, schools in California began to host their own Women's History Week programs.

Three years later, amidst widespread publicity of California's initiatives, United States Senator Orrin Hatch and then-Representative Barbara Mikulski co-sponsored the first Joint Congressional Resolution proclaiming a "Women's History Week." In 1987, the week was expanded to a month, and since then, the National Women's History Month Resolution has been approved every year with bipartisan support in both the House and Senate.

Fortunately, President Barack Obama has made it very clear that he, too, is not satisfied with just one month to celebrate women's achievements. Among the topics we'll hear about from our panelists this evening are the initiatives the Administration has taken to integrate women more fully into government and the political process.

Needless to say, it is a great honor for me, along with Jim Thurber, to sponsor tonight's panel.

And now, I am honored to introduce to you Neil Kerwin, the president of American University.