
Where Are the Women?

Issues of Importance
to the Women of
North Dakota

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Introduction

The first woman in the nation elected to statewide office was Laura J. Eisenhuth, North Dakota Superintendent of Public Instruction 1893-1894. Since then North Dakotans have voted just 14 women into statewide office (Center for Women and Politics, 2012). Currently, North Dakota has one woman holding a statewide office. The state legislature has just 14.9% women, giving North Dakota a ranking of 45th state in the nation. One woman sits on the Board of Higher Education. None of North Dakota's eleven state-supported colleges and universities has a woman as president. Just 22% of township officers are women (2011) and a mere 6% of county commissioners are women (NDCCA, 2011).

There are some bright spots. In 2010, 315 women ran for public office, seeking positions in statewide office, legislature, county, and city (Secretary of State web site, 2010). In 2012, that number has risen to 463 (Secretary of State web site, 2012). Although these numbers are dependent on the races reported to the North Dakota Secretary of State, they do give some indication of the interest women have in serving the public in a leadership position. Ready to Run, a non-partisan training provided by the North Dakota Women's Network for women candidates and their staff, has prepared 43 women to run for public office. Ten of those were on the June 2012 ballot.

There are women who want to serve. Women are looking for ways to prepare for public service. They are looking for the track to public office, a way to move their careers to a higher level, a position from which they can contribute their ideas for the greater good. Then why are there so few women serving, and why do so few women apply when a position becomes available? Just two women were considered for the recently filled position of Chancellor for the North Dakota University System, and neither of them made the short list.

These observations often prompt several questions. Why should we work toward greater participation by women in leadership? Haven't we already done enough to offer equality for women? Is this added attention to women fair to men? This white paper argues that it is not just about equality. Though several women's groups relentlessly seek equality and women certainly deserve equal opportunities, there are practical, strategic, and socially beneficial reasons for bringing women onto the leadership team. This paper is meant to give insight into the reasons and the research behind them.

The Case for Gender Diversity

In 2001, the Center for American Women and Politics released a report "Women State Legislators: Past, Present and Future" (2001). The report cites several differences between women legislators and their male colleagues. Women legislators of both parties differ in policy positions from their male counterparts, particularly in the areas of hate crimes, reproductive rights, education, and prayer in public schools. Women tend to consider how a piece of "legislation will affect women," and "believe they have a special responsibility to represent women's interests" (p. 10). With women in the legislature, minority and disadvantaged groups have greater access to lawmakers, and there is greater transparency with legislative business and less deal-making in the back room.

Women legislators are more likely to take into account the input of their constituents, and stay connected with women's groups. They are also more likely to collaborate with other women in the legislature, from both sides of the aisle. It is evident that women bring new perspective to the thought and process of legislation.

In the private sector, even more work has been done in the area of women and leadership. In 2007, a study by McKinsey & Company, "Women Matter," found that "companies where women are most strongly represented at board or top-management level are also the companies that perform best" (p. 1). Not only did they find that gender diversity could be an asset for corporate image, "companies with a higher proportion of women on their management committees are also the companies that have the best performance" (p. 14). A follow-up study in 2008, "Women Matter 2," suggests that women's leadership styles are critical to meeting the upcoming challenges of today's organizations (McKinsey & Company, 2008). Of the four leadership behaviors most important to corporate performance, "three are more often demonstrated by women" (p. 9) than men. (Inspiration, participative decision-making, and expectations and rewards) The study also suggests that women could be agents of change within a corporation, "spreading their leadership practices within organizations." (Foreword)

A Catalyst study, "The Bottom Line: Corporate Performance and Women's Representation on Boards" (2007) found that companies with three or more women on their boards outperformed those companies with no women board members in the areas of sales, capital investment, and return on equity. In response to the study, Stella Thompson, principal of Governance West Inc. stated, "Women really pull their weight on the board, and perhaps that's because they view this as quite an accomplishment and an honour to be on the board." (Teel, 2007)

Zenger and Folkman found that "women excelled in a majority of areas" in their research "A Study in Leadership: Women do it Better than Men" (2012, p.1). Based on 15 leadership functions, they found, "On an overall leadership effectiveness index females were rated more positively than males" (p.2). The largest difference between genders was realized in the areas of "taking initiative, practicing self development, integrity/honesty, and driving for results" (p. 3). In a blog entry on the topic, Zenger and Folkman state that "at every level, more women were rated by their peers, their bosses, their direct reports and their other associates as better overall leaders than their male counterparts – and the higher the level, the wider that gap grows" (Zenger and Folkman, 2012).

Sara Meyer-Davis blogs regarding the "Top 3 Reasons to Care about Women on Boards of Directors" (2012). Her reasons are as follows.

1. "Diverse teams develop more innovative solutions" (p. 32). Women control or influence more consumer spending, there are increasingly more women-owned businesses, and consequently women bring new ideas to the table.
2. "Women represent 50% of the work force" (p. 32) as well as increasingly graduate with advanced degrees more than men.
3. Future clients in the global economy will demand it.

Malli Gero, executive director of 2020 Women on Boards, agrees as quoted in “Women in the Boardroom” (Keller, 2012). “Women account for half of the U.S. workforce, half of all U.S. managers, and more than half of the population.” Gero also states “the most effective boards encourage the expression of different views to arrive at good decisions” (p.32).

In study after study, women are found to bring more innovation, broader leadership skills, and strong character traits to the board room and executive offices. A woman’s approach to legislating is often closer to her constituency, developed through collaboration, and negotiated with more transparency. It is evident that introducing gender balance has been beneficial in the private and public sectors. There are several academic studies that show “more diverse boards...improve the quality of board discussions and decision-making and contribute to organizational and financial performance” (Hodgson, 2012). Even with studies and conversations regarding the benefits of gender equity going back over a decade, women still hold just 14.6% of board seats in Fortune 1000 companies (Keller, 2012).

State of the State

There does not appear to be studies or independent results of gender balance on corporate boards in North Dakota. The one area where comparable data is readily available for North Dakota is state boards and commissions, which exists within the Governor’s page of the North Dakota State web site (North Dakota Office of the Governor, 2012).

An analysis of state government boards and commissions gives us a picture of how North Dakota state government is doing in leading us toward gender equity in this area. The single source for this information is the web page for Boards and Commission on www.nd.gov. In order to keep the information as consistent as possible, several decisions had to be made about what to include in the data and what was not.

Four of the entities listed on the website were not used in this analysis. The Commission on Education Improvements contains no information. The Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Advisory Committee has not been called upon since 2006. The Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Compact Commission expired August 1, 2003, according to Session Law 2001 Chapter 106 Section 2. Value Added Agriculture Promotion Board was repealed in 2011 according to Session Law 2011 Chapter 439 Section 7.

All names under the heading of ‘Member Name’ were counted as members. This can be confusing because sometimes a member will be noted as ‘Executive Director’ or ‘Board Administrator.’ However, the number of voting and non-voting members indicated on the website or designated in Century Code does not consistently calculate with the number of members plus or minus the Administrator. In order to be consistent, if the name was listed as a member, it was counted as a member in the data.

At times, there are more or fewer names listed as members than indicated in Century Code, state statute, or executive order. For example, the State Commission on National and Community Service has 25 members listed. Executive Order 2002-02.3 indicates there will be 18, the summary of the Executive Order on the boards and commissions website indicates 15. Again, in order to remain uniform, the

number of members listed under the heading of 'Member Name' on the website is the number of members used for analysis.

While North Dakota Century Code regarding gender balance excludes ex-officio members (NDCC 54-06-19), they were included here as members. It is not always clear which members are ex-officio, and even ex-officio members enjoy the same benefits of issue knowledge, networking, and process experience as other members.

To further define 'Governor Appointed,' the number was reached by deciding how many individuals the Governor was responsible for having on the list of members. At times a statute will indicate how many members are the responsibility of the Governor. Other times an Executive Order or statute will state that a list of names from a particular organization or government official should be submitted, but indicate that all members are then appointed by the Governor. In those cases, the number of members listed on the Board and Commissions website is the number noted as 'Governor Appointed.' The Governor is responsible for 72% of all board and commission appointments as listed on his web site.

To the greatest extent possible, determination was made as to how members of each board and commission are chosen. This was not always possible. A citation is not always noted on the Boards and Commissions web page, and a web search or phone call often yielded no information regarding origin.

All boards and commissions data were retrieved from the website April 16 – April 20, 2012, in order to limit the analysis to one snapshot in time. Consequently, if a name appeared in a member list of someone who is deceased or has left state government, they were still counted as members for this 'snapshot.'

Gender was determined by first names. Androgynous names required additional research or personal contact.

In the end, the analysis of gender on North Dakota State Government boards and commissions is only as good as the information provided on the state website. Regardless, it gives us some insight into where we are and the level of importance given to gender balance.

Although statute and executive order often outline the qualifications and parameters for board membership, gender was not found to be a factor. "Helen" felt that she was invited as an afterthought to a committee of 26 with only four women. "The long and short of it was I think I got the phone call on Friday afternoon to participate in this meeting that was either going to happen on Monday or Tuesday of the following week..." (personal communication, May 17, 2012).

North Dakota state government is somewhat ahead of corporate governance with women being 35% of all board members, compared with 14.6% of board members for Fortune 1000 companies (Keller, 2012) and 12.6% of U.S. boards (Hodgson, 2012). The results are somewhat different if the boards and commissions are divided into type. Advisory boards have 39% women, regulatory/licensing boards have 36% women, task forces have 36% women, and policy boards have just 24% women (North Dakota Office of Governor, 2012).

North Dakota has had statute in place since 1989 regarding the gender balance on appointive boards, commissions, committees, and councils. It reads:

Appointments to boards, commissions, committees, and councils of the state established by this code, if not otherwise provided by law, should be gender balanced to the extent possible and to the extent that appointees are qualified to serve on those boards, commissions, committees, and councils. Any appointment in accordance with this section should be made in a manner that strives to seek gender balance based on the numbers of each gender belonging to the group from which appointments are made. Ex officio members are not to be included in determining gender balance under this section (NDCC 54-06-19).

However, there is no transparent process in place to meet this requirement. Efforts to assist the Governor's Office in seeking qualified women for upcoming board openings have been rebuffed. To our knowledge, this white paper is the first effort to determine gender balance on North Dakota boards and commissions. There are no indications on the web site of the "numbers of each gender belonging to the group from which appointments are made" (NDCC 54-06-19) nor is mention made of what the gender balance is for each board, commission, or task force. There are 23 entities that have no women members. It is difficult to believe there are no qualified women in North Dakota who would be willing to serve on the Oil and Gas Research Council (10 members), the State Water Pollution Control Board (13 members), or the Lignite Research Council (26 members), to name just three.

As a strictly subjective exercise, boards were sorted by female identified, male identified, and non-identified. Female identified boards included North Dakota Council on the Arts, State Board of Cosmetology, and North Dakota Humanities Council, boards that could be identified with typically stereotyped women's issues. Male identified boards included State Electrical Board, Pardon Advisory Board, and the Administrative Committee on Veterans Affairs, boards that would be stereotyped as male. This sorting yielded 28 female identified boards with 64% women. Eighty boards are male-identified with just 20% female membership. Thirty-four boards could not be gender identified, and had 38% women. Although this sorting is clearly not objective research, it suggests that the difficulty in reaching gender parity may lie in reaching out to women in nontraditional fields.

Benefits of Appointments

There are undoubtedly benefits to serving on boards, commissions, councils, and task forces that are unspoken and only privately acknowledged. Benefits that are commonly known include the people one gets to know. "[T]ypically you are sitting at a table with really smart people, learning constantly," states Sheila Ronning, president and chief executive officer of Sharp UpSwing (Keller, 2012, p. 35). Women can "hone their collaborative skills while focusing on solutions..." says Cindy Burrell, founder of Diversity in Boardrooms (Keller, 2012, p. 33).

Board members also learn the perceptions and positions around the issues of the day, they are among the first to see emerging issues, and they become familiar with the process of resolving issues. "Lauren," a veteran of three state boards in North Dakota and several non-profit boards, says, "It's a huge opportunity to network and learn about what else is going on in North Dakota. And what needs are out

there, to learn about the gaps and who is doing what to fill them” (personal communication, May 21, 2012). All this is experience women can eventually bring to other boards, their jobs, and perhaps even elected office.

Women who sit on boards have the advantage of being visible in the public and private sector. The decision-makers and influencers get to know them and learn to trust them. A board member can build credibility within the business or public service community and use that to move forward in their career.

“Helen” found personal satisfaction in the positive outcomes of the committee on which she served, but could not say she considered it a boost to her career. “[M]y perception was I was one of very few Democrats that were seated at the table. I think I felt that more strongly than feeling that I was one of the few women that were there” (personal communication, May 17, 2012). She also found the committee a little intimidating, as it was her first experience in serving on a committee for the Governor. She found herself seated with a group, mostly men, who were well known and influential in their career fields. “Well, they’re mover and shakers for sure” (personal communication, May 17, 2012). These veteran committee-men were accustomed to stating their opinions in an imposing group, and having their opinions matter. “Lauren” simply said that having served on boards enabled her to “be a better director that works for a board...” She also found it “wonderful to have a national perspective” by having served on a board for a national association (personal communication, May 21, 2012).

A benefit that is not as obvious is the role model gender parity provides to the next generation. In 2010, the North Dakota Women’s Network released a report “Junior and Senior High School Girls in North Dakota: Assessing Their Aspirations and Challenges” (Slobin, 2010). Analysis of focus groups of urban and rural junior and senior high school girls living in North Dakota found that many have trouble strategizing a career path. Some attributed the problem to a lack of access to career related courses in their schools and the lack of gender equity education provided. However, a surprising number expressed helplessness due to the prevalence of gender stereotypes. They expressed worry about not being taken seriously, facing discriminatory wages, and hiring bias (Slobin, 2010). Seeing more women in the boardroom, more women in management, and more women in public office would change the paradigm for young women.

Barriers

While women at every level are thought to be superior to their male counterparts (Zenger and Folkman, 2012) the gender imbalance both in the public and private sectors remains. “Unfortunately, unfairness does exist in the workplace” (Zenger and Folkman, April 4, 2012). Even in the 21st Century, women are stereotyped as having strengths only in certain areas. Zenger and Folkman’s research confirmed biases toward males in areas like sales, operations, engineering, IT, R&D, and facilities management. Our own analysis of state boards and commissions, although not scientific, found 80 male-stereotyped boards with just 20% women representation. That appears to reflect the findings of Zenger and Folkman. Certainly there are fewer women in law enforcement or working in the coal industry. However, there could also be a certain amount of implicit bias contributing to the lack of gender balance in some areas.

Avivah Wittenberg-Cox (2012) discusses the male norming of corporate culture. In order to be promoted or have their talent recognized, women must adopt male styles. She reasons that “most senior male executives have never (yet) left their male-dominated environments and companies” (p. 1).

McKinsey & Company (2010) determined three important barriers. The “double burden” syndrome refers to the work life balance problems that many women have faced. Being recognized as the child bearers and primary caregivers is a familiar burden to many women. The second barrier is called the “anytime, anywhere” performance model, in which employees are expected to have unlimited availability and be ready to travel or take any geographic assignment in order stay on the promotion track. And the third barrier is the “reticence of many women to advocate for themselves” (McKinsey et. al., 2010, 2007 p. 6).

The idea that by not speaking up women can be a barrier to themselves is also explored by Herminia Ibarra (2012) in her blog contribution “Help Women Take the Stage.” Ibarra discusses Sheryl Sandberg’s contention that women don’t speak up and need to be mentored to put themselves forward (Ibarra 2012, McKinsey & Company, 2007). Meanwhile, male mentors are moving their mentees to the next career level. According to Sylvia Ann Hewlett, founding president of the Center for Work-Life Policy, women need more than mentors – they need sponsors. Hewlett defines a sponsor as “someone who advocates for my next promotion and speaks of your strengths and makes the case for your advancement in your absence” (Vault.com, 2011).

There is also the theory that with a lack of female role models, women have a “heightened perception of the difficulty of achieving success” and “lower professional ambitions than men” (McKinsey & Company, 2007, p. 9). This was found to be true in the North Dakota Women’s Network study of junior and senior high school girls (Slobin, 2010). Before even entering the career track, junior and senior girls already discuss the difficulties of achievement in a male-dominated and gender biased world. The experiences of their role models hitting the glass ceiling, having a job or promotion going to a man with lesser credentials, and pay inequities is very visible to them.

It seems as though women have been discussing some of these same barriers for generations. What is even more subtle is North Dakotan’s adversity to change. Even young women, juniors and seniors in high school, do not talk about changing the culture or expecting the culture to change. They expect the favorable bias toward men will still exist when they enter the job market. They don’t talk about dispelling the myths regarding what is ‘women’s work’ and what is ‘men’s work.’ They talk about how “gender inequality would limit their capacity of fully participating in society as adults” (Slobin, 2010, p. 67). Change in the culture that regularly sees men as superior to women isn’t even in the conversation.

Case Study: The Commission on the Status of Women

Governor William Guy established the Commission on the Status of Women October 10, 1963, but did not provide it with a budget (State Historical Society of North Dakota, 2012). The Commission met and submitted a report to the Governor in 1964 with recommendations for action by the legislative assembly. They were successful in repealing a law that exempted women from jury duty, passing an equal pay law, and repealing a law denying women overtime.

The Commission does not appear to be active again until 1972 when the enthusiasm to pass the Equal Rights Amendment brought more than 50 women's organizations together to encourage Governor Guy to bring the Commission back to the forefront. He did so, with the overall goal "to assist in bringing women into full partnership in the life of the state" (Historical document, source citation unknown). In 1995, the Commission was described by its chair as not "effective for reasons of inadequate funding, staffing and general continuity" (Harms, 1995, p. 2). With the intention of having the Commission focus on economics and education issues for women, it was moved into the Commerce Commission where it resides today.

And indeed, the North Dakota Century Code directs that the Commission "shall coordinate activities and serve as a clearinghouse and an advisory group to the division of information relating to economic development programs that focus on career development for women." Code also directs the Commission to "encourage interest, participation, and cooperation with state departments, agencies, and other organizations in developing needed services, facilities, and opportunities and provide consultant help to local organizations created for the purpose of coordinating activities for the economic and career development of women" (NDCC 54-34.3-10).

However, the Commission on the Status of Women meets infrequently. An inquiry for meeting minutes of the Commission yielded an email reply from the Director of Board and Commission Appointments that, "In visiting with a few members, they stated they haven't had a meeting for a long time and there are no minutes available" (N. Weiler, personal communication, April 18, 2012). Requests from the North Dakota Women's Network to be informed of upcoming meetings have not yielded a reply since 2008. There is very little contact information for the board members on the Governor's Boards and Commissions web site, and much of what is listed is out of date (North Dakota Office of the Governor, 2012).

During the 2009 legislative session, Senator JoNell Bakke sponsored a bill to expand the membership of the Commission on the Status of Women from five to eight members and broaden the scope to include domestic violence, child care, women's health, and women's educational opportunities. Discussion in the Senate Human Services committee to which the bill was assigned revolved around duplication of efforts, the fear that women's health issues would include discussion of reproductive rights, a huge fiscal note of \$703,000 for a commission that previously had no appropriation, and that "We don't have similar programs for men" (Lee. J., Senate Standing Committee Minutes, 2009). The bill went to the Senate floor with no recommendation from the standing committee and failed.

Little wonder that the women of North Dakota feel abandoned in their quest for equal opportunity. The very Commission that was intended to bring them into full partnership in the life of the state remains non-communicative, inaccessible, and ineffective. The Commission on the Status of Women is not known to reach out to women's groups or associations. Although it has been stated to the legislature that the Commission partners on events (Holt, T., Senate Standing Committee Minutes, 2009), they do not appear to be visibly involved. A web search for media coverage yields primarily historical references.

Recommendations

There are recommendations in nearly every research paper and blog discussing the issue of gender balance.

One school of thought expressed by McKinsey and Company is that increased participation by women in senior management will change the culture to be more supportive of working women, to “help reconcile work with family life” and see “gender equality promoted in the workplace.” They also suggest “creating and monitoring gender diversity indicators,” encouraging flexibility in working hours, considering careers with sensitivity to breaks for maternity and child rearing purposes, requiring one woman on every short list, and implementing mentoring programs (McKinsey & Company, 2007, p. 20-21). Surprisingly, they also suggest changes in career advice in secondary schools in order to change the perception regarding ‘men’s jobs’ and ‘women’s jobs’ and even discuss changing the model of family responsibilities to encourage greater balance at home.

In 2010, McKinsey and Company’s recommendations included having gender-diversity indicators as part of management performance reviews, skill building programs for women, gender-specific hiring goals, programs to smooth transitions before and after parental leaves, and quotas for hiring, retaining, promoting, and developing women.

Cindy Burrell states that women should position themselves through relationships in order to be considered for corporate boards (Keller, 2012). European countries are moving toward quotas (Keller, 2012, Wittenberg-Cox, 2012) and legislation (Broysberg, 2012). Catalyst suggests setting business targets, questioning whether evaluations are gender neutral, and checking talent management systems to see whether the “think-leader-think-male” default is embedded (Catalyst, 2011).

The analysis of state government boards and commissions for this work was somewhat revealing, but it would be richer if the data were more accurate and the appointment process more transparent. It is noted that “very few companies actually publish their gender statistics...” for the simple reason that “the statistics reflect the constant and largely unconscious preference and promotion of men over women” (Wittenberg-Cox, 2012, May 16).

North Dakota has a statute directing attention to gender balance on boards, commissions, committees, and councils. That statute should be implemented in the appointment process and made more visible by adding information regarding gender balance to the Boards and Commissions web site. The gender balance of the population served along with the gender balance of the committee should be noted. It is noted that this statute is weakened with the language “...should be gender balanced to the extent possible...” (NDCC 54-06-19).

Consequently, it is also recommended that North Dakota statute should be strengthened. Montana statute includes a directive for the Secretary of State to publish appointments monthly along with upcoming vacancies (Montana Code, Section 2-15-108). Rhode Island statute refers to “the effectiveness of each appointed state board, commission, and the governing body of each public authority and quasi-public corporation is enhanced when it reflects the diversity, including the racial and gender

composition, of Rhode Island’s population” (Rhode Island General Laws, 28-5-1-3-1). Connecticut directs the gender balance to “be representative of the state gender balance to “the extent possible”” (Connecticut General Statutes, 4-9B) and West Virginia simply mandates “membership that is balanced in terms of gender...” (West Virginia Code, Section 18B-2A-1). These examples may be helpful in developing original language to assure that our statute is effective. The statute could also be broadened to include private entities that use public funding.

It is also often stated, in this paper and elsewhere, that women simply do not speak up. Women’s groups recommend mentoring women to seek opportunities with boards and then offer to serve. “Lauren” identified board work as a good learning experience and a good place to network with state policy makers. She recommends identifying areas of interest where one would “want to make a difference... [then] get to know some of the people who are already on there...and let them know you’re interested” (personal communication, May 21, 2012). This is good advice and should be offered to all women.

There should also be easy access to openings as they occur and an explanation of the process to apply and appoint. Perhaps public entities should follow the lead of some private corporations that are requiring at least one woman on the short list for every appointment. Recruiters could also accept the assistance of women’s groups interested in finding talented, skilled, qualified women to serve in these positions. Even if the members of a commission are outlined in statute, there are women who fit those qualifications as well as men.

Although it has been tried and failed, it would be a positive step for women and the benefits they bring to the table if the Commission on the Status of Women were more effective. North Dakota should return to the promise of making women full partners in the life of the state. A decade of research proves that the benefits of inclusion are innovation, leadership, integrity, as well as monetary. Centralizing these issues into one advisory commission would provide the coordination and focus that are holding North Dakota back in the effort to achieve gender equity and the advantages it entails. And if the legislature revisits this issue, it should consider term limits for commission members as a means of keeping the ideas and energy fresh. Staggered terms should be enforced. Currently, terms of four members end June 30, 2012.

And finally, a gender analysis of non-profit and corporate boards in North Dakota is recommended, similar to the comparisons made with state boards and commissions in this work. Such a study would be beneficial to the profit and non-profit entities in the state, considering the many advantages diversity brings to a board and the organization it oversees.

Conclusion

North Dakota has gone from being the first state in the nation to have a woman holding statewide elective office, to a ranking of 45th in the nation for women in state legislature. Even though there are women ready to step forward into leadership, at least 463 women running for a public office in 2012, we will not have gender parity after elections – 119 years after Laura J. Eisenhuth made us first in the nation.

There is a decade of research substantiating the value of women in the workplace. Our educational system produces graduates who are 60% female (Wittenberg-Cox, 2012) yet our statistics on women in leadership remain stagnant or sometimes regress. If the defense to that situation is that women do not have the appropriate credentials, then we should consider whether talent managers are asking for the right qualifications. There is a wealth of talented, skilled, extraordinary women in North Dakota, and our corporate, political, and social culture is denying us the benefit of their expertise.

What is implicit if not openly stated throughout the research is that top management has to be engaged. In order for any of the recommendations to make a difference in private or public sector culture, change needs to be driven, or at least supported, from the top. As members of a democracy, we often expect leadership from our government. In this case, the attempts made through government action have not been effective.

Where we go from here will depend on the women who step forward to lead our state. But it will also depend on the leaders who are in charge now. Will they look to the future and be the agents of change that will ensure a prosperous tomorrow? Or will they protect the status quo and wait for nature to set the course?

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