

St. Mary's College of Maryland
Margaret Brent Lecture
Judy Woodruff Speech—FINAL
November 14, 2003

Thank you Hannah, and thank you Professor Lois Stouer. I am delighted to be with you this evening, and honored to have been asked to give the Margaret Brent lecture. What a lovely campus and what a jewel of an institution of higher learning you have tucked away in southern Maryland! I have so many connections with you that I hardly know where to begin.

The head of your Center for Democracy, of course, Zach Messitte, I've known for years, because he worked with me at CNN. Thanks to him and his extraordinary research skills, I was spared from making a fool out of myself on the air, at least for the two years he worked with me! You're very lucky to have him. Among the distinguished members of your College Board of Trustees, is our dear long-time family friend—Ben Bradlee, legendary editor of the Washington Post. The Chairman of the Historic St. Mary's City Commission is another dear friend, Dick Moe. And finally, we are neighbors: our family has owned a summer home on Battle Creek in next door Calvert County, for the past 18 years. So while this is my first visit to your beautiful campus, I feel I've known you for a long time!

I wish I could have met Margaret Brent, a woman ahead of her time. She sounds like a gutsy woman and if it weren't for women like her, women today wouldn't have the freedoms we have to vote, to run for office, to demand equal pay for equal work, and to receive the same rights and privileges as men (even without an equal rights amendment!).

All of us do what we do, on the shoulders of those who came before and having role models like Margaret Brent, and the other women so important in the early days of our country—particularly later during the long struggle for women's suffrage—makes all the difference.

I know I take heart from a comment I first heard many years ago by the Canadian writer, Charlotte Whitter. She said: "In order to be considered equal with men, a woman has to be twice as good." "Luckily," she added, "this is not difficult."

When I first talked to Zach Messitte about this speech, I thought I'd talk about the role of women in the news media. I helped to found an organization back in 1990—called the International Women's Media Foundation—dedicated to promoting opportunities for women in communications worldwide. Our motto has been what

you see in your program tonight, the title of my speech, “No press is truly free unless women share an equal voice.” And I believe that with all my heart and soul. What we’ve seen over the past 13 years is truly mind-boggling. As democracy broke out around the world—in Eastern Europe, South Africa, the Philippines, South America, and other places—these countries started to experiment with a free press. In most instances, these countries had little history with an independent media, and news organizations had to start from the ground up. We found there was no tradition of women working in media in so many places, and we discovered having just a little boost, a word of encouragement, and eventually, a conference, a training session...made a difference in the lives and careers of these women. Whether it was figuring out how to get the nerve to ask for a job, or a promotion to suggest a story be covered, or how to deal with sexual harassment—our program made a difference. Since then, we’ve sponsored conferences on every continent except Antarctica and Australia and we have a lively network for thousands of journalists who know they can count on each other for support. It’s the mirror opposite of that one saying that women don’t support each other. These women do!

Every year, we honor women journalists from around the world with a Courage in Journalism Award, because they have literally risked life and limb to get at a story! This year we honored women journalists from Ukraine, Guatemala, and an American

journalist—Ann Garrels at NPR, who stayed in Baghdad during the Iraq war, reported almost around the clock!

But I also thought I'd like to speak tonight about two other things I have a great interest in: the current presidential campaign (because it's one year away exactly!), and the role of women in American politics today. And when I'm done, I invite your questions about any of this, or anything else you're interested in. I'm inspired by what Margaret Brent accomplished in her day, and it made me want to take a closer look at how far women have come in terms of influencing politics and public policy in our time.

The numbers are familiar to all of us by now: a little more than half of the voters in the United States are women.

But out of the fifty states, there are only seven women Governors (A new one this week in Utah, Lt. Governor Olene Walker who became governor after Gov. Mike Leavitt was appointed as Bush's EPA administrator). That's a little over 12 percent, and that's a record. Here in Maryland, Kathleen Kennedy Townsend was one of six others who ran and lost a year ago.

Out of 100 United States Senators, only 14 are women. The Dean of the group: Maryland's own Barbara Mikulski (14 percent, and another record). But after watching the Senate pull a couple of all-nighters this week, bitter partisanship played out as marathon talk-a-thons, it makes me wonder why anyone with any sense would want to serve in the Senate anyway!

And out of 435 members of the U.S. House of Representatives, there are 59 women. That's 13 and a half percent; almost the record—we seem to be stuck around there!

Exactly half the states send at least one woman to Washington, to represent them in the U.S. Congress. And this year, for the first time, a woman was selected to head her party in a house of Congress: Representative Nancy Pelosi of California was elected Minority Leader of the House by her Democratic colleagues. Many of you may know, she grew up in Baltimore, as the daughter of a prominent Maryland politician.

One quarter of the statewide office holders in the country today are women, down a little from four years ago. But the percentage of women serving in all the state legislatures has been holding steady at 22 percent since 1997.

Now, this may sound discouraging to those who thought women would be doing better by 2003, but the fact is that women have come a long way just since 1979, when they made up only THREE percent of the members of Congress, overall.

In addition, women have been elected mayor of some of the largest cities in America, including Dallas, Portland, Cleveland, Long Beach and Atlanta.

And a few brave female souls have run for President, though none successfully, obviously. From the first, a woman named Victoria Woodhull in late 1800s, to the past few decades, with Shirley Chisholm, Pat Schroeder, Elizabeth Dole in 2000, and Carol Moseley Braun, seeking the Democratic nomination for president right now.

They—like all women who run for public office—find it harder to raise money, harder to juggle family and professional responsibilities, and frankly, harder to get people to take them seriously, than men candidates have. Many women have decided that the complete sacrifice of a private life, especially during their childbearing years, is not worth it. But perceptions are changing. Polls show more Democrats prefer Hillary Rodham Clinton for President this year than any of the people who ARE running. If President Bush is re-elected, the smart betting is that she WILL go for it in 2008.

Let me take a quick poll: how many of you believe a woman will be elected President in the next 12 years...any woman?

Of course, women don't have to wait to be elected to serve in top jobs in the federal government, however. A number have been appointed to senior positions.... in the Cabinet and elsewhere. Dr. Condoleezza Rice, who is President Bush's National Security Adviser; Madeleine Albright - Secretary of State under President Clinton; former Attorney General Janet Reno, are just a few.

And don't forget the two most powerful women in the third branch of government, the Judiciary: Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, considered by many to be the most powerful woman in the country because she's so often the decisive, swing vote on the high court; and her colleague, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Clearly Republican women act and vote more conservatively than do Democratic women in office, with some exceptions. But what I find interesting is that women of BOTH political parties not infrequently have different policy priorities than do their male counterparts. Women are more likely to give priority to public policies related

to women's traditional role as caregivers in the family and society—for example, policies dealing with children and families, health care and education.

More women than men lawmakers, of both parties, also have worked on some type of women's rights issue—spousal abuse and rape prevention and punishment, for example. Many more women than men opposed requiring parental consent for minors seeking an abortion; more female than male legislators opposed the death penalty. In the Congress, and in state legislatures, women have worked across party lines, to push for Medicaid coverage for low-income women diagnosed with breast or cervical cancer.

I don't want to get too carried away here, and make it sound as if women all vote alike. Obviously, they don't; they are entirely capable of being every bit as partisan as their male colleagues. But sometimes, on some issues, they cast votes better explained by their gender, than their party affiliation. I wonder what Margaret Brent would say about that. I doubt she'd be surprised!

The other subject for tonight, the presidential election, has not been on the radar screen of many Americans until very recently. In fact a poll done just a few weeks

ago, showed most people couldn't name a single one of the nine Democratic candidates for President.

I know you can do better....so let me throw it out there. Let's name all nine of them...who wants to name them? (Clark, Dean, Edwards, Gephardt, Kerry, Lieberman, Kucinich, Sharpton, Braun.)

Howard Dean, the former Vermont governor is getting a lot of attention. Someone said the other day when they were asked, who's supporting him? "Well, he's for both civil unions for gay couples, and for gun rights, unlike a lot of Democrats. So he must have the vote of all the gay hungers locked up!

Actually, the competition between Gov. Dean and Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts has gotten fairly nasty because both are vying for the title of frontrunner. It's gotten so bad the two men now evidently really despise each other. Which reminds me of the relationship decades ago between Winston Churchill and Lady Astor. Things got so bad that once they were together, Lady Astor looked at the British PM and said, "Sir, if you were my husband, I'd poison your coffee." To which Churchill replied, "Madam, if you were my wife, I'd drink it."

At this point, the political press corps is most focused on Howard Dean, Dick Gephardt and John Kerry, because after months of campaigning, they're in the best position in the two January lead-off state primaries—in Iowa and New Hampshire—by virtue of polls, organization, money and endorsements. But there are 66 days to go until that cold January night when Iowa Democrats go to their precinct caucuses to cast their ballots, and as some of us like to point out, two months is a lifetime in American politics. Anything can happen between now and then. Of course, that hasn't stopped many of the analysts and pundits from declaring Dean the frontrunner, with Gephardt and then Kerry as next most likely, and General Clark on the fringes of possibility. Nor has it stopped them from giving John Edwards and Joe Lieberman little chance because they've struggled to catch on with voters in these earliest states.

What is clear is that Dr. Dean has raised the most money so far, and done it in a way no one else ever has...on the Internet. More than a quarter of a million people have sent him contributions that average \$77 apiece, according to the Dean campaign. And that makes the former governor of Vermont sort of a grassroots phenomenon. He's done so well with the Internet, that he's become the first Democrat to decide not to take federal matching funds for his campaign, allowing him to exceed the spending limits that come tied to that public money. Instead, he says he'll try to compete with the money President Bush has raised, which dwarfs the Democrats' war chests, by

asking 2 million Americans to send him \$100 apiece. That would be \$ 200 million, an impressive pile of cash to carry him from victory in the primaries—if he can pull it off—to the national convention in July, a period when otherwise Democrats would be outspent many times over by the Republicans. (John Kerry announced today he's following suit to opt out, but his wife is Teresa Heinz, of the the ketchup fortune).

Whatever happens, it will be fun to watch what Dean can do, and to watch the others try to catch up, even as some lament the failure of all the efforts over the years to rein in the runaway, mind-boggling hold that money now has on our presidential politics.

Whoever wins the nomination of the Democratic Party, they face an uphill challenge to knock off the incumbent. President Bush came into office in 2001, having won the Florida recount, but lost the national popular vote, and won the electoral vote by a whisker. He was still proving himself in the fall of 2001, when terrorists flew commercial jets into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and life as we know it in the United States, changed forever. Since then, Mr. Bush has impressed most Americans with his leadership of the war on terror, in Afghanistan, and here at home. The war in Iraq has been more complicated. Most people originally supported it and believed it was worth sacrificing the lives of young American men and women. But as the months have gone by, and the death toll has risen, almost daily, more

Americans question whether the war in Iraq was justified. A majority continues to say the war will have been worthwhile, even if weapons of mass destruction are never found.

Where there is more division among Americans is on the conduct of the war since major combat ended last April. Sixty percent of Americans now say the President underestimated the situation, including 47 percent of Republicans. And only 45 percent of Americans say removing Saddam Hussein from power was worth the number of U.S. military casualties, and the huge financial cost of the war.

This no doubt plays a role in the President's decision this week, to shift strategy, and try to move much more quickly to having the Iraqis take control of the government. Before this week, the Bush administration argued that there should be an orderly process toward the writing of a constitution, and toward holding democratic elections. Now the view is that Iraqis need to be in charge of their own fate, even before these steps take place. It's clearly an effort to begin to remove the huge American presence in Iraq, even as the President says he won't cut and run. Hand in hand with this, there are plans to begin to draw down the number of troops, earlier than originally projected. If that happens, we can only assume the American people will react positively.

But the Bush administration has a tricky maneuver to pull off here—to draw down troops, and turn Iraq over to the Iraqis, without letting the country slide into chaos again, and without letting allies of Saddam Hussein get back in control, or back in a position where they can prevent progress from being made. That's not going to be easy. Wherever Saddam is, if he's alive, he and his supporters had to be thrilled with news this week that the U.S. is trying to pull out sooner rather than later. For the Bush administration, with an election less than one year away, their gamble is that Iraqi people will be able to, with little or less U.S. involvement, to establish the bulkhead for democracy—that President Bush once spoke of the U.S. crafty on its own. The other big element in this election will of course be the economy. The experts tell us things are getting better, that productivity is up, and eventually jobs will come back on stream, as well. For the President, he has to hope that is the case. The public mood is already lifting, but for that to continue, people will need to see the right trends in hiring people who've lost their jobs.

In a poll out just this week, NBC and Wall Street Journal, 43 percent of the public say they're likely to vote for President Bush, and 40 percent for the Democratic candidate. We're facing potentially an electorate that is evenly divided as it was in 2000. We'll see if that lasts. In closing, since we started out talking about women, I

thought I'd have a little secret not many people know: that there is a good chance we'll see the same gender gap in this election, as we saw in 2000. In that year, Al Gore won 56 percent of the women's vote, and only 44 percent of the men's vote, while George W. Bush was just the opposite: 56 percent of men's vote, 44 percent of women's vote. Right now, we're seeing virtually the same gap between the parties, according to a new Pew Research organization, women tilt toward an unnamed Democratic by a margin, 56 percent to 44 percent for Bush, while men favor President Bush, 58 percent to 42 percent. Nobody has a good explanation of why this is, but my strong guess is that women, as usual, feel more vulnerable when the economy has been down, and they may be taking longer to be persuaded that the recovery has taken hold. And women are troubled by the casualties in Iraq. Beyond that, maybe some of St. Mary's professors of political science classes can help me out!

I would wrap up with a line from Margaret Thatcher, the former British Prime Minister. never particularly known as a feminist. She said, "If you want something said, ask a man. If you want something done, as a woman." It might have been her campaign slogan. No doubt Margaret Brent would have appreciated the thought.

Thank you so much!