

## Still a Long Way to Go

By Jan Collins

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# Columbia ★ Star

Columbia has been in the news for more than two weeks now because of the deadly flooding that has befallen our city.

But next Wednesday, Oct. 21, the city will be in the news for an additional reason: for the 24<sup>th</sup> year, it will be the site of the longest consecutive annual remembrance of Anita Hill's famous 1991 testimony before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee.

This year's "I Believe Anita Hill" party will be held from 5:30 to 8 p.m. at 701 Whaley Street.

As most women of a certain age remember, Anita Hill was the young, poised law professor who told the Judiciary Committee, albeit reluctantly, that her former boss, Clarence Thomas, had sexually harassed her. Thomas was then a nominee for Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

The country was thunderstruck. Professor Hill's shocking testimony brought the subject of sexual harassment in the workplace to the fore like nothing else had ever done. Her testimony continues to reverberate today because sexual harassment is with us – still.

Recent surveys show that one of every four women in the United States has been sexually harassed at her workplace. Only 29 percent reported the harassment while 71 percent did not for fear of retaliation.

There's more. Women in higher-paid nontraditional jobs continue to suffer high rates of sexual harassment. Some 88 percent of female construction workers are sexually harassed, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. Moreover, between 60 and 70 percent of women police officers say they have experienced sexual/gender harassment. So have more than 84 percent of women firefighters.

Of those women who reported they had been sexually harassed at work, 45 percent had earned a bachelor's degree, 29 percent had some college, and 19 percent had graduate degrees.

Most of the harassment is reported to be verbal. Some is through unwanted touching and sexual advances. Some is through inappropriate texts or emails.

A third of all charges filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) deal with sexual harassment in the workplace.

So, sexual harassment has not gone away. It also has morphed into other forms: a 2014 Pew Research Center survey reported that roughly one-quarter of women aged 18 to 24 said they have been stalked or sexually harassed online.

The good news is that because of Anita Hill's brave testimony nearly a quarter-century ago, the spotlight continues to shine on sexual harassment.

The bad news is that while things have improved in many ways for U.S. women since 1991, there is still a long way to go. Consider:

- In 2014, American women working full time earned only 79 cents for every \$1 earned by a full-time male worker.
- The gender pay gap increases with age. After 35, women typically earn 75-80 percent of what men are paid.
- At every level of academic achievement, women's median earnings are less than men's.
- South Carolina voters have never sent a woman to the U.S. Senate.
- No woman has served in the S.C. Congressional delegation since 1993.
- Only 13.5 percent of seats in the S.C. legislature are held by women.
- There is only one woman currently serving in the 46-seat S.C. Senate.
- The United States is one of only two countries around the world that doesn't mandate any paid family leave to new mothers. (The other is Papua New Guinea.)
- The United States has no nationally funded system of child care, unlike most developed nations.
- Sexual assault continues to be a problem on American college campuses.
- The two women seeking their party's nomination for the U.S. presidency in 2016 have been denigrated for their looks.

(Thanks to the Anita Hill party researchers and their website, [anitahillparty.com](http://anitahillparty.com), for many of these figures.)

The Anita Hill Party on Oct. 21 is free. It is a wonderful way to network with other women and to remind ourselves that while we have come a long way in the past 24 years, it's not time to rest on our laurels.

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