

## Women Do It Better

By Jan Collins

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Well, Valentine's Day has come and gone, and while I was showered with diamonds and furs and a trip to Paris (uh huh), I didn't get what I would *really* love: more women in charge. More female mayors, more female police chiefs, more female heads of Fortune 500 companies, more female governors, more female state legislators, more female members in the U.S. Congress, more female Supreme Court justices.

Of course, if Hillary Clinton runs for president next year and wins, we will finally have a woman in the most powerful job on the planet. My 92-year-old mother says she intends to stay alive long enough to help put a woman in the White House – and Mom is a very determined woman.

Why should there be more women in charge, at all levels of our society? For one thing, because “Women Do It Better Than Men.” This is the title of a leadership study published in 2012 by the *Harvard Business Review*. It scrutinized performance evaluations of 7,280 leaders and concluded that women outscored men in 12 of 16 competencies that are crucial to “outstanding leadership”.

And, while the study confirmed the long-held view that female leaders are, on average, more nurturing, it also found that women especially outscored men in “taking initiative,” “practicing self-development”, and “driving for results”. These aren't characteristics usually ascribed to women.

More women should also be in charge, I believe, because it changes the way others think when they see a powerful woman chairing a Senate hearing, or holding a press conference at a crime scene, or leading a boardroom discussion.

Children, particularly, need to see women in charge so that girls can aspire to these positions, and boys think it's okay – and natural – for women to do so.

When my daughter was about 4 years old, I asked her one day what she wanted to be when she grew up. “Maybe you'd like to be a doctor,” I suggested. “Oh, no,” she replied, “I can't do that.” Why not, I pressed, reminding her that her aunt (my sister) was a dentist. “Because Jack says girls can't be doctors,” Jennifer replied,

referring to her 4-year-old classmate. (As it turned out, my daughter became a specialist in environmental public policy.)

Today there are many more women in positions of leadership than was the case 30 or 40 years ago. But let's not pat ourselves on the back just yet. Here is Barnard College President Debora Spar, who told a White House conference on urban economic development last year that "women remain hugely underrepresented at positions of power in every single sector across this country." We have fallen, Spar said, "into what I call the 16 percent ghetto, which is that if you look at any sector – be it aerospace engineering, Hollywood films, higher education, or Fortune 500 leading positions – women max out at roughly 16 percent. That is a crime, and it is a waste of incredible talent."

Yes, it is.

Even when the news is pretty good - the percentage of women in the current U.S. Congress is now at about 20 percent, a historic high – there are caveats. The Republican takeover of the Senate last month, for example, meant that several women who were powerful committee chairs lost those positions.

When Democrats controlled the Senate, women "led a record nine committees," said *The New York Times*, "including male bastions like the Appropriations Committee, which dispenses billions in federal dollars, and Intelligence, which oversees the government's secret national security apparatus. Now there are only two female committee chairs: Senators Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Susan Collins of Maine."

That's a better track record, of course, than in the South Carolina Senate, which has a grand total of one woman out of 46 members. Even worse, for several years until Katrina Shealy was elected to the SC Senate in 2012, there was not a single female in that chamber. Not one.

Women are 51 percent of the world's population. It's time that South Carolina, in particular, and the United States, in general, catch up with states like New Hampshire – with its all-female Congressional delegation - and with countries like New Zealand, France, Germany, Iceland, Denmark, and Sweden, where women are represented in goodly numbers at the highest levels of government and business, and where women's leadership talents are appreciated and rewarded.

**Jan Collins** is a Columbia-based freelance writer, editor, and journalist. A former Nieman Fellow at Harvard University, she is the co-author of *Next Steps: A Practical Guide to Planning for the Best Half of Your Life* (Quill Driver Books, 2009).