



Women's Council  
· Wisconsin ·

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**Minutes of the Meeting of the  
Wisconsin Women's Council – June 1, 2016  
Wisconsin State Capitol, Rm 328NW, Madison, WI**

**Mary Jo Baas, Chair**

**Board Members Present:** Mary Jo Baas, Cindy Block, Patty Cadorin, Nicole Bowman, Representative Janel Brandtjen, Karen Katz, Jessie Nicholson, Kim Nickel and Senator Janis Ringhand. Not Present: Senator Dave Hansen, Katie Mnuk, Carrie Richard and Jessica Ward. A quorum of Board members was present.

**Others present:** Christine Lidbury, Executive Director; Jen Cole, Wisconsin Women in Government; Jenny Erickson, Sauk County UW-Extension; Dan Hill, Center for Local Government, UW-Extension; Representative Jessie Rodriguez; Representative Melissa Sargent; and Dane County Board Supervisor Hayley Young. Special visit by Lieutenant Governor Rebecca Kleefisch.

The meeting was called to order at 11:35AM.

Approval of the minutes of March 2, 2016 was deferred to the September meeting..

**Research Presentation: Why Don't More Women Run?**

Dan Hill, Local Government Center, UW-Extension  
Jenny Erickson, Sauk County UW-Extension

Meeting participants were asked to think of the names of five women who would be good elected officials. At the end of the meeting participants discussed their choices.

Dan Hill thanked the Council for its data collection and reporting on women and elected office in Wisconsin. He noted that this is the primary source for these data in Wisconsin, which he regularly uses – crediting the Council – in talking about this issue.

Impetus for the Research

- In Wisconsin, like the rest of the U.S., studies have shown that women are less likely to run for elected office. This is also borne out by the Women's Council benchmark data.
- Women do decide to run they are elected at the same rate as men.

- So, why don't more women run? The idea is that once we have a better understanding of the barriers, we can develop programs that will encourage more women to seek local elected office.

### About the Research

- Two waves of research. The study's authors developed two separate surveys asking current officials and potential candidates to identify barriers to running for office.
- First, all county board supervisors in Wisconsin – men and women – were asked to reflect back on considerations in weighing the decision to run. About 1600 surveys were sent out with a 37% response rate.
- Second, “potential candidates” for local office were identified to survey by working with local UW-Extension offices and other community leaders. The researchers received responses from 38 Counties. The survey for “potential candidates” had a 56% response rate.

General discussion ensued on how the questions were developed, whether questions might be leading, and potential for bias based on who responded and who did not.

### Findings

- The surveys identified long list of barriers with similar lists for both research groups.
- Women's reasons for staying out of the political arena often differed from those given by men, including:
  - A significant difference between men's and women's perceptions of how qualified they were to serve in local elected office, with 71% of men and 60% of women saying they were well-qualified.
  - About 19% of women said “making decisions in public” acted as a barrier, compared to less than 5% of men.
  - Running against an incumbent was seen as a barrier for 24% women compared to less than 6% of men.
  - Finally, nearly 31 percent of women said they had “concerns about reprisals or criticism,” while less than 18 percent of men were worried about getting negative feedback.
- They also found that women are the most influential in recruiting women to run.
- Further analyses and next steps to put the findings into practice are still a works in progress.

A general discussion ensued on “how would you encourage women to run”. Responses included:

- women often need to be asked – often more than once
- ask with other people who can help and be a team
- offer statistics that say she can win, i.e., “you fit the profile of the district”
- know something about who else is running

It was noted that the ability to take a leave of absence to know you have your job, win or lose, is an important factor in deciding to run.

Discussion was raised on how to assess variables based on socio-economic privilege and how (whether) the researchers will disaggregate the data. Researchers noted that there was no way they could have done so without funding for the project.

Discussion ensued on the role of the spouse, with all of the elected officials noting the importance of having a spouse that is supportive and understands the demands that come with both running and serving.

It was said that “making the case” can be important when asking a woman to run because when women know there is a real need, women will set up.

One elected official at the meeting noted that when doing doors, she found women were the best supporters, often excited that another female was running. Another official agreed but also noted that some of the harshest critics were often women.

Christine distributed the article, “Handling hate: Women in politics face a remarkable amount of sexist vitriol,” by Jessie Opoien, The Capitol Times, May 11, 2016. The article shares stories by a variety of elected officials, including Lieutenant Governor Rebecca Kleefisch and Representative Melissa Sargent.

Lieutenant Governor Rebecca Kleefisch joined the meeting.

Discussion continued around the discussion, “Handling hate” and the experiences of candidates and officials to being on the receiving end of these situations, as well as very personal and specific remarks/postings regarding their children, homes and safety.

It was noted that it is often the case that women in elected office watch each other's backs. They also emphasized the importance of giving a hand back to women to join them at the table.

Lt. Governor Kleefisch emphasized that moving women to turn away the opportunity to give a gift of public service because of the backlash, this was not what our founders intended. “I think they intended for a great, robust, respectful debate about the future direction of our country. That only comes when you treat other people with respect regardless of their ideas.”

4. Christine reminded Board members about the upcoming 2016 Trailblazer Awards on June 22<sup>nd</sup>. The Award Ceremony will be held in the Governor's Conference room with the awards

presented by Governor Walker. The BMO Trailblazer Award Reception will follow in the Senate Parlor. Board Members were urged to attend the events. Christine thanked Board Member Patty Cadorin and BMO Harris Bank for again providing financial support for the program and sponsoring the reception.

5. Christine updated Board members on the Council's sponsorship of the Bought & Sold - Human Trafficking Public Education & Awareness Traveling Art Exhibit. The exhibit has concluded its run successful run in Racine and is scheduled to be installed in Beloit at Riverside Park for the month of July.

6. There were not public comments.

Motion to Adjourn. Moved Jessie Nichol; second, Cindy Block. Approved.

Respectfully submitted,  
Christine Lidbury