



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Diane J. Savino

Senate Majority Leader Malcolm A. Smith, Senator Diane Savino and Other Members of the Democratic Conference Pay Tribute to Women's History Month

DIANE J. SAVINO March 10, 2009

(Albany, NY)- Today, Senate Majority Leader Malcolm A. Smith, joined by a bi-partisan coalition of women Senators, celebrated the achievements, contributions and struggles of women with a Resolution to commemorate the month of March as Women's History Month. The Resolution commemorates women who have made significant contributions to society and recognizes women trailblazers in the political history of New York and our country, including 10 sitting women Senators here in New York. "In commemoration of Women's History Month we celebrate the richness and diversity of women everywhere," said Senate Majority Leader Malcolm A. Smith. "Whether it is the heroics displayed by women in military service, their ascension to positions of leadership within the governmental and business communities or their daily struggle to achieve equal rights, women help make our communities whole and play a key role in improving life for us all." "Women everywhere should be proud of the achievements made by former New York Senator and current U.S. Secretary of State Hillary R. Clinton, Nancy Pelosi the first woman Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Michelle Obama the first African-American First Lady of the White House," said Smith. "I am also especially proud of my wife Michelle Lysby-Smith and Michelle Page Paterson for the contributions they have made to the state of New York and women everywhere," said Smith. Since 1919, the year before the 19th Amendment

guaranteeing women's suffrage was passed, women have played a substantial role in the New York State Legislature. Ida Sammis and Mary Lilly became the first two women elected to serve in the State Assembly in 1919 and the following year were joined by two more women, Marguerite Smith and Elizabeth Gillette. In 1934, after having served ten years in the Assembly, Rhoda Fox Graves became the first woman elected to the State Senate where she served with great distinction for fourteen years before retiring in 1948. Several other women followed Graves in the Assembly and the Senate during the 1930s and 1940s, with a steady stream to follow in subsequent years. The year 1990 is known as the Year of the Woman in New York State's legislative bodies, because 27 women were newly elected to the legislature and today more than 50 women serve in the New York State Legislature. On the federal level, Shirley Chisholm in 1968 became the first black woman elected to Congress, and had been an outspoken advocate for women and minorities during seven terms in the House. Chisholm, represented New York's 12th Congressional District from 1969 to 1983. In 1972 she became the first major-party black candidate for President of the United States and the first woman to run for the Democratic presidential nomination. Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Matilda Joselyn Gage never served in the Legislature, but were undoubtedly among the most instrumental New York women to lead the struggle for suffrage. "Women have been integral to every social justice movement in our country's history. It is only fitting that we recognize their achievements and I commend Majority Leader Malcolm Smith for doing so. Today we celebrate all the women leaders, who with their strength and determination, paved the way for younger generations of women," said Senator Diane J. Savino (D-Brooklyn/Staten Island). "I am honored to recognize March as Women's History Month. In my years in the Senate, women have made significant gains in seniority and influence in state government," said State Senator Suzi Oppenheimer (D - Port Chester). "Within the legislature, women now hold key leadership positions and chair important committees which demonstrates our added voice in guiding public policy." "I applaud the honorees and all of the women of our great nation who have set the standard for excellence in so many

ways. To mothers, grandmothers, sisters and aunts, our Empire State celebrates your accomplishments and pioneering spirit, which continues to inspire women of all ages to realize their full potential," said Senator Velmanette Montgomery (D–Brooklyn). "When I was elected in 1999, I was the first woman senator from the entire borough of Queens, and since then, I have become the first woman to Chair the Higher Education committee. I look forward to a day when qualifiers like 'first woman' are no longer necessary," said Senator Toby Stavisky (D–Flushing). "The women being honored here have truly distinguished themselves in their professions. Their tenacity and determination have inspired generations of young girls to fulfill their dreams," said Senator Ruth Hassell-Thompson (D–Bronx). "I am proud to pay tribute to them and recognize the tremendous gifts they have bestowed upon our society." "As one of the few female legislators I am proud to recognize the trailblazing women throughout history who have made my achievements a possibility," said State Senator Liz Krueger (D–Manhattan). "However, I think it is just as important to note that the struggle is far from over and I will continue to fight for women's rights until there is true equality in this State and our entire country. When that day comes it will be time for a real celebration." "Women's History Month is a wonderful opportunity to showcase the tremendous accomplishments of women, both past and present, who have influenced our lives in countless ways. It is so important for our children and teenagers to have positive role models. This celebration each year is a great chance to remind them of what can be accomplished with the right motivation and hard work," said Senator Betty Little (R–Queensbury). "I applaud Majority Leader Malcolm Smith for bringing this important resolution commemorating March as Women's History Month to light," said Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins (D–Yonkers). "Throughout our history, without and with suffrage, without and with equal rights—women have and continue to have the abilities and courage to shape our society and to make it a better place for all." "As women across the world continue to penetrate into fields once regarded as a field only suitable for men, it is befitting to not only commemorate Women's History Month, but to celebrate it," said Senator Shirley L. Huntley

(D–Jamaica). “Trailblazers such as Shirley Chisholm, Eleanor Roosevelt, Oprah Winfrey, Michelle Obama, among many more notable women have paved the way and left an undying imprint on the progress women have made and continue to make.” The public celebration of women's history in this country began in 1978 as "Women's History Week." In 1981, Congress declared Women’s History Week a national holiday. Due to overwhelming support and participation, in 1987, the declaration was extended to include the entire month of March.

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