



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Sanders Jr.

Inspiring Women to Run for Office: Senator Sanders hosts successful "Women in Power" workshop

JAMES SANDERS JR. March 16, 2015



State Senator James Sanders Jr. (D-Rochdale Village) hosted a successful "Women in Power" workshop on Saturday, March 14, 2015 at New Jerusalem Baptist Church in Jamaica. The event, which was held in honor of Women's History Month, was attended by about 100 women who were eager to explore the forum's topic - "How to Run for Office."

Guest speakers included Congresswoman Grace Meng of Queens, Assemblywoman Rodneyse Bichotte of Brooklyn and Assemblywoman Michaelle Solages of Nassau County.

They discussed the unspoken side of public life, what it feels like to win (and lose) an election, and tips for managing work and family.

There were also six panelists who shared their thoughts on government and female empowerment. They were Britney Whaley, Selvena Brooks and Michelle Gilliam, co-founders of the newly established Shirley Chisholm Foundation, civil rights lawyer Jenifer Rajkumar, singer and anti-bullying advocate Meredith O'Connor, and healthy lifestyle coach and plus-sized model Kalyea Moss.

The event was co-sponsored by Vote Run Lead, a national non-partisan organization that supports the aspirations of women who want to transform our country and democracy through their leadership. VRL staffers Erin Vilardi and Juanita Lewis spoke about campaign planning and organizing as well as the importance of social media and how it can be used to expand one's visibility.

State Senator James Sanders Jr. said: "I want to involve you in my conspiracy – a conspiracy of hope. We are going to gather together with some of the best people that money can't buy – folk who are not just interested in this community, but all communities – a new America, a place where it's not all against all, a place where we look out for each other. Imagine that – what we could be if we were just bold enough, if you would just take it, if you would have faith in yourself. If you are not going to run then you should support somebody in this room who does plan to run."

Congresswoman Grace Meng said: "Balancing work and family is incredibly difficult. Every week when I make that trek to Washington, I have to remind myself that this is a worthy investment. When my five-year-old tells me that President Obama does not need me in Washington, because my son wants me to stay home in Queens, I have to remind myself that

this is a worthy investment that I am making. If you and I don't step up, someone else may not. So I just want to encourage you and let you know that whether you are in government, politics or some other field, there is no easy solution, but you do the best you can, and people can be inspired by your actions."

Assemblywoman Rodneyse Bichotte said: "We don't want women to be apprehensive when it comes to being at the forefront and getting their voices heard. When I decided to run, trust me, people asked, 'Why is this woman getting involved in the political sphere? This is not a place for her.' Even in my culture, being Haitian-American, you don't find many women taking political positions. It's very difficult. ... In 2012, I ran against an incumbent and I lost. That did not stop me. I continued and continued, and in 2014, I found victory, and amazing things are happening."

Assemblywoman Michaëlle Solages said: "Women are a solid foundation in our country and it is so important that we empower women. I can tell you that across this country only 23 percent of women are involved in state legislatures – that's very low. They are not well represented in congress and they are not well-represented in staff positions behind those legislators, especially minority women. ... We are not getting our fair share, but can we sit here and complain, no. Instead, we have to get involved. We have to run."

Erin Vilardi of Vote Run Lead said: "Social media is the new tool in the tool box, but it doesn't replace any of the old tools. It doesn't not replace door knocking. It doesn't replace community organizing. It doesn't replace good, old-fashioned talking to people and making those personal connections."

Juanita Lewis of Vote Run Lead said: "The art of having a one-on-one conversation has disappeared. In order to build more warriors to change the status quo, we need to go back to

that art of having conversations along with using social media. We can't swap one for the other. The two should be integrated. ... If you are running for office, you need to have relationships with other people because they are your voters, they are people you want to have volunteer for you, they are also individuals who will give you money. You have to be able to have those relationships and those conversations to know what moves people to act. Power is organized people and organized money."