

Women urged to embrace politics

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Sen. Clinton tells Peace Center crowd, 'we still have a long way to go'

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U.S. Sen. Hillary Clinton appeared in Greenville Monday to push for a larger role for women in politics, saying they are needed to improve schools, support higher education and reform health care.

"We've opened doors of opportunity, but sometimes it's taken a while to get through them," the New York Democrat told about 2,000 people at the Peace Center. "More women in politics will be right for our country, for minorities, for women."

She said, "We've made tremendous progress in recent years but we still have a long way to go."

"We cannot rest," she said in a 40-minute talk at a "Women and Politics" forum sponsored by Furman University's Richard W. Riley Institute of Government, Politics and Public Leadership.

She said more women need to run for public office and put citizenship -- becoming involved in a community -- at the top of their personal agendas and goals.

"If we don't get women even to compete, we'll never know if it would make a difference or not," the former first lady said.

Katie Vagovic, 18, a Furman freshman majoring in music and pre-med, called Clinton's speech "motivational" and supportive of women's rights, but said she's glad the senator didn't appear to be "a hard-core feminist."

"We really need people who can reach out to women and have a positive influence on them without telling them to overtake," Vagovic said.

According to the Rutgers University Center for the American Woman and Politics, the number of women in state legislatures has increased more than five-fold over the past three decades.

Yet, women remain underrepresented among political officeholders, particularly in the highest offices. Women are about 53 percent of the population.

South Carolina leads the Southeastern states in female voter registration and voter turnout, but the state ranks last among the 50 states in terms of the number of women serving in the state legislature.

Of the 124 people in the South Carolina House of Representatives, 14 are women. South Carolina has no women in its congressional delegation and only one woman in the state's history has ever been elected in her own right to Congress -- Liz Patterson, who served in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1987-1993. Superintendent of Education Inez Tenenbaum is one of only three women who have ever held a statewide elective executive position in South Carolina.

American women gained the right to vote 83 years ago after years of debate and struggle.

Riley, former South Carolina governor and U.S. secretary of education, said Clinton's speech had "an insight for a woman going into higher public office, a higher legislative public office and some of the challenges she had

and some of the interesting experiences she had."

Carol May, vice president of marketing for the Peace Center, said the capacity seating in the Concert Hall, where Clinton was scheduled to appear, was 2,086 people. Less than 100 seats were available Monday afternoon, she said. A few empty seats were visible Monday night.

Lesley Stahl of "60 Minutes," who had been slated to appear with Clinton, canceled her trip to the two-day event because she had to go to California to cover the recall. Stahl was replaced by Deedee Corradini, former mayor of Salt Lake City.

An aide said Clinton wasn't expected to stay overnight in Greenville County, where civil rights officials have called for an economic boycott because the county has not formally adopted a paid holiday honoring Martin Luther King. The City of Greenville has an MLK holiday.

Carl Sobocinski, owner of Soby's Restaurant on Main Street, said Clinton had dinner at 6 p.m. in a corporate apartment above Soby's on The Side, 22 E. Court St., before heading to the Peace Center for the Performing Arts for the 8 p.m. conference.

The menu included a first course of goat cheese souffle with sauted morel mushrooms, a second course of carrot and ginger soup with duck confit and a third course of roasted garlic grit cake and seasonal vegetables.

Liquor and beer were included in the menu price, which wasn't disclosed, and wine was available for \$18 and \$19 a bottle. An estimated 30 people were on the guest list, Sobocinski said. Secret Service officials would prevent the public or media from going inside, Sobocinski said.

The dinner Monday night was a private function for donors and supporters of Furman and the Riley Institute, said Vince Moore, the spokesman for Furman's Riley Institute, .

Earlier Monday, Clinton signed copies of her new book "Living History" in Columbia from 2:30-4 p.m. When she arrived at the bookstore, a line of about 400 people lined flowed outside ready, said Andy Graves, the bookstore's owner.

Moore said Clinton wasn't paid for her Peace Center appearance.

Clinton, 55, was elected senator from New York in 2000.

Last year, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright spoke on diplomacy at the first national event for the Riley Institute.

Cutlines:

OWEN RILEY JR. / Staff

Political talk: The audience listens to Sen. Hillary Clinton at the Peace Center Monday night.

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Conversation: Sen. Hillary Clinton, left, and Deedee Corradini, former mayor of Salt Lake City, discuss women in politics on the stage of the Peace Center.

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Furman forum: Sen. Hillary Clinton greets someone in the audience Monday at the Peace Center.

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