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Title: ASSURING NATIONS TREAT WOMEN WELL PROTECTS US ALL
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U.S. Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton said ensuring the safety and status of women around the world will make the world safer for democracy.

She told 2,000 people at the Peace Center that countries that treat women poorly are often cauldrons for fundamentalism and violence. It is no longer a luxury to make sure that women are educated and healthy, she said.

It is one way to prevent another repressive society that fosters terrorism, such as Afghanistan or Iraq.

"It is part of what we should be standing for around the world," she said. "It is not only the right thing to do, it is the smart and strategic thing to do."

Clinton gave the opening address at the two-day "Women and Politics" conference, sponsored by the **Riley Institute** at Furman University.

She encouraged women to participate fully in society - to follow politics, to vote and to contribute, whether through volunteer work or elected office.

Here and abroad, she said, "Where women participate, it is more likely democracy will flourish and take deeper root."

South Carolina ranks last in the nation in the rate of women holding elected office. Clinton lamented that fact, but noted that South Carolina was not alone. Nationwide, fewer women have been running for local and state offices than at any time in the last 20 years.

Clinton attributed the low participation to the challenges that come with public service, such as raising money and sacrificing time with family.

But she said that women also underestimate themselves, even fearing that they may not be good enough. "That's not a fear that affects a lot of men."

She quoted Eleanor Roosevelt, who said that to participate in politics, you had to have skin as thick as a rhinoceros.

"It's true then and it's true now," she said. "You can't let the give and take get to you."

State Rep. Gilda Cobb-Hunter, D-Orangeburg, said Clinton is an inspiration, as she has risen above the barbs thrown her way and the relentless attention and criticism accompanying her husband's presidential administration.

"She is a helluva woman," Cobb-Hunter said. "All this stuff just rolls off her back."

Cobb-Hunter is one of 16 women in the S.C. General Assembly, and one of only five African-American women. She hopes the conference will encourage more women to run for office.

"It's important to see someone like Hillary Clinton," she said. "It's important to have other women encouraging women."

Clinton took questions submitted by Furman faculty and staff, including whether the United States would ever have a woman president -and whether it would be herself.

"Just between us," she said, jokingly. Then she said she anticipates that the United States will have a woman president one day, but that woman will have to answer the perception that still exists that women should not serve as executives.

Outside the Peace Center, Bob Kunst of Florida sold buttons urging Clinton to run for president. He was traveling with the "Clinton-Clark" movement, trying to urge Clinton and Gen. Wesley Clark to run on the same ticket.

Clinton received standing ovations upon taking and leaving the stage, and lengthy rounds of applause, especially when she joked about running for office: "I get speculated about a lot."

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WOMEN IN S.C. POLITICS

By the numbers, women don't fare well in South Carolina's political system:

* The state ranks last in the nation in the rate of women in political office. The Washington, D.C.-based Institute for Women's Policy Research ranks South Carolina 50th in office-holding and 46th overall in the status of women.

* Only 14 of 124 members of the S.C. House are women; women hold two of 46 S.C. Senate seats.

* No women are in the state's eight-man congressional delegation. Democrat Liz Patterson was the last woman in the delegation, representing the Upstate 4th Congressional District from 1987 to 1993.

* State Superintendent of Education Inez Tenenbaum is the only woman currently elected to statewide office.

* Gov. Mark Sanford eliminated funding in June for the only state agency that focused on women's issues, the S.C. Commission on Women. The commission continues to exist in name, but lost its two full-time staff positions and its \$99,955 budget.

* The governor's full-time, paid executive staff includes four women and 16 men. The average salary among the men is \$71,010. The average salary for the women is \$59,751.

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