

Denver City Councilwoman Robin Kniech

Women's March 2017

Leading from our Strengths

Hello Colorado!

Buenas tardes, como estan? How is everyone?

What an amazing day so far – we have been listening to beautiful artists and incredible speakers. But I want to hear a little more from all of you – **who here is ready for some audience participation?**

Ok, let's warm up. I'm going to ask some questions and you're going to make some noise if I'm speaking to you – do we have some City of Denver residents in the house today?

I'm *your* At-large City Councilmember, you voted for me, I work for you – thank you for that honor. I am really humbled to be here today.

There are also many other elected officials from across the state hiding among you out there – raise your hands electeds, let everyone see where you are!

(If hasn't been done before) Who else do we have? I want to hear from you too?

Metro Denver

Fort Collins

Seniors

Boulder County

Out of town guests

Colorado Springs

Kids

Nice job, y'all are good at this!

I'm standing here today as an elected official because of the women's movement. I learned everything from lobbying to running a press conference as pro-choice college activist. Working with domestic violence and sexual assault survivors motivated me to go to law school. Working with and for women helped shape me into the leader I am today – where I work on issues that disproportionately impact women, but touch everyone in our community - like reducing poverty and expanding affordable housing.

So let's talk about *leadership*.

I'm a believer in a very old adage with a bit of a twist. It used to go – now you have to help me finish the sentence – **“Behind every great man, there is a _____ (*great woman*) _____.”** But here's how I like to think about it:

Behind every great woman, there are....many other great women. Sometimes we know these women. A mom who inspired or showed us how to be strong. A woman who taught us, hired us, promoted us,

or mentored us. The child care providers who take care of our children while we run businesses, organizations, or governments.

I want us all to pause for a moment – men too -- and think about a woman we know, who shaped us, supported us or made our leadership possible. Let's honor those women by saying their names out loud.

On the count of 3 – let's hear those names - 1 – 2 –3

And the women we don't know personally. The women who changed the arc of history so it would be legal for us to vote and run for office. The first female doctors or scientists or engineers. The women who were injured or died during the civil rights movement so African Americans could walk through the doors of opportunity later.

History books don't always write their stories or names. But if you can think of the name of a woman you never met, who paved the way for you, maybe even before you were born, let's honor them too.

And on the count of 3 – say her name out loud. 1 – 2 –3

So...now the question is...what does it mean to lead in the world we find ourselves in today? We face real and serious threats. But we aren't underdogs. We are strong. Many of the laws of this land are on our side, like the 14th Amendment to the Constitution. And look around us – we are many. We have to lead from our strengths.



Let's start with personal leadership. Because, you know our foremothers taught us, for women especially, the personal is political.

1) For me – this begins with being my authentic self. I'm a lesbian, and I'm out. The folks I work with – whether its on transportation or trash – pastors or park rangers --- they know that I'm gay. I might be the only lesbian they know. By being who I am, I believe, that in small ways, I am opening hearts and minds – the vulnerability of true stories changed the hearts and minds that made gay marriage the law of this land. We are strong when we lead from our true selves. Do we have some gay and lesbian folks here with us today, some trans folks, make some noise?

How bout some allies?

2) I'm also a mom. **How many moms, step-moms, grand moms do we have out there?**

- Parenting is leadership, every day. It's sleep deprivation and leadership. This year parents talked a lot with daughters, leading them to understand they can be anything they want to be. We have to keep encouraging our daughters to lead, and fostering their strengths. **Let's here from the parents of daughters, make some noise.**
- And the sons. **I'm a mom to a son, how many of you are raising sons?** If the last year has taught us anything it is that we need to be talking *a lot* with boys and young men about women. About respect for women, their bodies, about preventing sexual assault. And about girls and women as equals in all roles.

3) And finally, I'm going to get *real* personal here. I am a white woman. We are in a very scary time. Racial intolerance persists in our country. And we have lots of political work to do to fight oppression against black and brown communities, to protect civil rights, promote inclusivity. But I'm here to say we have some personal work to do too. To lead as a white person – anywhere. in our families or our neighborhoods or our workplaces -- requires exploring our own privileges we didn't earn, like driving around without ever getting pulled over. And it requires speaking up about race, in those small uncomfortable conversations with friends and family, and in bigger, public spheres. And standing in solidarity with and fostering the leadership of people of color. We are just days past celebrating Martin Luther King's legacy, and I renew my vows to doing this personal work.

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***And then we Need Community and Political Leadership Too (you didn't think I'd skip the political work did you!)***

**Let me ask – did a few of us here today have high hopes for a woman president this year?**

Women presidents don't drop from the sky. They are most likely to come from governors and senators, and those folks might come from state legislatures or city councils or school boards. So think about running. Encourage other women to run.

Fewer than 1 in 4 voters voted in the year I was elected - **Who here will join with me in a commitment to vote in every election, twice a year, including school boards and city elections?**

The economy of our city would fall apart without the contributions of our immigrant neighbors. Their families would be devastated by regressive immigration policies. **We have the strength to resist anti-immigrant attacks, are we ready to lead that resistance together?**

Let's talk about health care: millions of women have health insurance today that is threatened – and every woman with insurance right now has free preventative care and mammogram screenings, is protected from bias, access to birth control – **we have the strength to fight to protect women's health care, are we ready to lead that resistance together?**

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Thank you to the organizers and volunteers of this march. And to each and every one of you.

We aren't underdogs. We are strong women and we stand on the shoulders of many, many strong women. We are all, already leaders. And we have the strength to lead both the personal and political work it will take to fight any threat that comes. Si Se Puede.