

Fresno's first female mayor says nation may be ready for woman president

By Paul Schlesinger
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In 1989, Karen Humphrey broke a glass ceiling in Fresno, becoming the city's first female mayor. She believes the nation may now be ready to break a much more daunting glass ceiling.

"I think the country might actually be ready for a woman president," Humphrey told a gathering celebrating the 75th anniversary of the League of Women Voters of Fresno.

Humphrey, who served as mayor between 1989 and 1993, was the keynote speaker Monday night inside Roger Rocka's Dinner Theater in the Tower District. She said that while the league was nonpartisan, she would admit to a bit of partisanship and said she hopes to see Hillary Clinton win the presidency.

No matter who wins the White House, though, she said the League of Women Voters will continue to play an important role in encouraging open government and civic involvement, especially for women.

Humphrey said that she would be supporting the Democratic Party during this presidential race and wanted Clinton to be president over Bernie Sanders.

But she said she would support Sanders if he won the nomination. That wouldn't be the case with GOP candidates.

The former mayor said she felt the Republican Party has lost its "moorings."

I remain convinced that the citizen's voice matters. I remain convinced that while politics will always be messy and can challenge one's integrity, we can make it more honest, transparent and fair to all stakeholders.

Karen Humphrey, Fresno's first female mayor

She found it appalling "that the Grand Old Party's presidential hopefuls have been reduced to two demagogues and a man who appears to be an adult but who supports terrible anti-woman policies."

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"This is not Abraham Lincoln's party," Humphrey said.

Humphrey grew up a Democrat and said she remembered an era when both parties were a lot less ideological than they are now – when people would be able to support any presidential candidate who got into office, despite disagreements over their policies.

Humphrey went on to discuss how the league has helped nurture women who can run for public office while also making all issues women's issues for 75 years.

"The league has empowered more woman's leadership, participation, influence and election to office, both locally and nationally, than any other organization on the planet," Humphrey said.

Humphrey used Republican presidential candidate's Donald Trump's campaign slogan while telling the audience that more women needed to be engaged in government. She said around 25 percent to 30 percent of public office

positions were held by women.

“Instead of ‘Making America Great Again,’ we need to recognize that a truly great nation assures the equalizing of woman’s participation in public leadership,” Humphrey said.

Humphrey felt that civic education could be taught earlier and better to get more people involved in politics. She also said that social media can be used to reach out to younger women.

Humphrey remained confident that organizations like the League of Women Voters would help to make politics better despite worries about aging membership, reduced financial resources and feelings of less relevance in today’s world of the Internet.

“I remain convinced that the citizen’s voice matters,” Humphrey said. “I remain convinced that while politics will always be messy and can challenge one’s integrity, we can make it more honest, transparent and fair to all stakeholders.”

Humphrey added that the league’s work is needed now more than ever in today’s political climate.

“Your work, your voices, your energy, your belief in a true and living democracy, are all needed now more than ever,” she said. “ I know you’ll be there no matter how long it takes.”

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