

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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Springfield makes it to C-Span

One wintry day in January, I received a telephone call from Carol Leary, the president of Longmeadow's Bay Path College. She wanted me to serve on a panel at a conference she was planning. March sounded very far away, and I assumed I would be talking to a few college students. But the event quickly boomed and by March 29 it dominated the city of Springfield. That Friday, the day of the conference, nearly 800 women (and a few good men) gathered at the Sheraton Hotel. Elizabeth Dole appeared as the keynote speaker, and the event was filmed for showing on C-Span. Here is a recap of that blockbuster day.

As president of the woman's college, President Leary focuses on women's roles in the work place. The conference, "New Ways of Doing Business: Conversations with Women of Influence," served to educate her students and enrich working women. Ms. Leary assembled participants who could share wide ranging experiences with those interested attendees.

As a member of the panel of political women, I learned as much as I enlightened others. Channel 22's Brenda Garton moderated the group of politicians, keeping us all in line as we answered questions about negotiating our way through the traditional smoke-filled rooms of our business. Kathy Whitmire talked about campaigning and governing the city of Houston, while Senator Melconian and I dealt with Massachusetts issues.

Modesty requires me to admit that my panel was not the main reason for the success nor the factor that attracted C-Span's attention. Elizabeth Dole accepted Mrs. Leary's invitation when her husband was only the Senate majority leader, but the event arrived the same week Bob Dole clinched the Republican nomination for the presidency.

Ms. Dole was invited to speak because she is president of the American Red Cross as well as a former cabinet officer (Secretary of Transportation and Secretary of Labor). As a possible future first lady, she attracts public curiosity and national media attention, but her speech dealt with her career, not that of her political husband. From her career as a young lawyer to her position at the head of the Red Cross, she shared experiences with her audience.

As a Western Massachusetts woman, I was proud that the conference could be seen across the nation. Bay Path College benefits from well-deserved credit for planning the event. Western Massachusetts gains by showcasing the overwhelming public interest in a conference for working women. Every viewer gains from the opportunity to see a dynamic speaker outside of the commercial television's 30-second sound bite.

The men as well as the women in the audience came away from the day with new understanding. And now, before the memory of a successful event fades. Bay Path is already planning a second annual conference. Stay tuned for 1997.