

Remarks of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.)
Vermont's 20th Annual Women's Economic Opportunity Conference
June 4, 2016

Good morning, and thank you for being here today to help us celebrate Vermont's 20th Annual Women's Economic Opportunity Conference. I want to thank President Smith and Vermont Technical College for hosting us once again. It takes a lot of effort to pull together an event such as this, and VTC has been such a great partner over these many years.

This conference marks a milestone of sorts -- two decades of tradition, bringing Vermont women and others together to advance the conversation of economic opportunity for women of all ages. I am so pleased that U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch has joined us on this occasion. You may have also noticed that Marcelle is not here today. She is attending our grandson's high school graduation this morning, but she sends her best wishes. Both she and I look forward to this event every year.

This is a proud day for me. When we started this event, we weren't even sure if people would come - and now look at the crowd. Over these 20 years, I have seen deep professional connections and friendships made, as women come together to learn, to share and to inspire. I have heard stories of women who have taken a leap of faith to start a small business; women who have found the confidence to embark on a new career path; women who found the support they needed to help balance the demands of family and work.

But we know that the need for a conference like this is greater than ever. Last year, I spoke about a new project in Vermont called "Change the Story." Its partners – the Vermont Women's Fund, the Vermont Commission on Women and Vermont Works for Women – are all represented here today.

The project recently released two economic status reports that tell us there is still much work to be done. We know that half of all Vermont's working women are in fields that pay less than \$35,000 a year – compared to just 13 percent of Vermont men. This means that too many women are working full-time, yet do not earn enough to cover their basic living expenses.

To quote their report, “Developing a women’s economic potential *is* sound economic policy.” We know this, and we *can* help change the story. That is why we are here today, and that is why I will continue to do all I can to support these efforts in Washington. Every Vermonter deserves economic security, regardless of gender.

I am so pleased to introduce you to a great ally in this effort. When I asked her to keynote this conference, I told the Attorney General how inspired I was by the compelling personal stories she shared during her confirmation hearing last year in the Senate Judiciary Committee. I said her grace and perseverance, and her commitment to civil rights had won her many admirers in my home state. I think the crowd here today proves this to be true.

Born and raised in North Carolina, Attorney General Lynch is the daughter of a fourth-generation Baptist preacher and a school librarian who instilled in her the values of fairness and equality. She earned her law degree from Harvard and embarked on a path that led her to become the nation’s top law enforcement officer.

I had the privilege of attending the White House ceremony in which President Obama announced her nomination to be the country’s 83rd Attorney General. It was during that event that Ms. Lynch noted that the Department of Justice – quote - “is the only cabinet department named for an ideal.” In public service, she has committed herself to making that ideal a reality for all Americans. Please join me in welcoming the United States Attorney General, Loretta Lynch, to Vermont.

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