



Opinion Editorial

Finding Purpose in the Power of Choice

By Karen Pressley

(KENNESAW, GA. May 26, 2009) Following Mayor Shirley Franklin's roundtable event at Atlanta City Hall this morning, I am struck by the impact of two stunning events held simultaneously in different cities but with converging purposes. While leaders at the "Women Surviving in Tough Times" event advised the guests that they need to speak up and increase their participation in public policy making, President Obama nominated Sonia Sotomayor for the Supreme Court, where she will be the third woman to serve on the high court, the first of Latino descent, and the first Justice to grow up in public housing.

While this morning's event gave a platform to advocates telling of battles for local legislation to address crises that affect every resident of Georgia, it was nothing short of encouraging to hear about another woman breaking yet another glass ceiling on a national level.

As two representatives from Kennesaw State University's Siegel Institute for Leadership, Ethics & Character, Program Coordinator Joann Trodahl and I had, at first, questioned our reason for attending this morning's event. As a northwest Georgia regional university, why should we venture on a 52-mile round trip to connect with a women's event in downtown Atlanta when it would have been as easy to think, what does this event have to do with us?

The answer began to unfold as we walked from our Washington Street parking deck toward the event and met DeQuanda Sanders-Payton searching for the same building. The three of us pounded the pavement together for the next ten minutes while Joann and I learned that our acquaintance had driven in from Decatur where she serves as the Executive Director of a non-profit organization, Saving Our Children and Families (SOCAF), Inc. We were all the richer from learning of DeQuanda's activism in raising social awareness of domestic violence issues, which have risen dramatically in Atlanta as a direct result of stresses caused by our economic crisis. Fifteen minutes later, over bagels and coffee while awaiting the conference to begin, we met and learned of Maggie Beck-Coon's efforts as the Research and Communications Coordinator for the Georgia Commission on Family Violence, and her group's achievements in working with advocate groups and legislators on a similar project as DeQuanda's. Within thirty minutes, we had seen at least three women leaders who had served as guest speakers at Siegel Institute "Women Leading Social Change" event.

Why is it that we continuously cross paths with advocates for reducing domestic

violence, with organizations striving to raise awareness on issues from child abuse and human trafficking (Atlanta is #2 in the nation), unemployment and poverty that stems from lack of education, housing and unemployment crises, and on? Because these matters are so very present, so very prominently in our faces, that they scream at us to take up the call to lead.

What did this morning's event have to do with us? As an academic institute at Georgia's third-largest university, we value our role in KSU's efforts to help students and community members lead ethically, and to meet the challenges of improving awareness and integrity through lifelong learning. This can sometimes be an overwhelming task, due to that needle-in-a-haystack feeling that creeps up as we create plans for courses, events and community reach-out programs that affect social change. The same kind of needle-in-a-haystack feeling that DeQuanda Sanders-Payton and Maggie Beck-Coon shared with us. We launched the Graduate Certificate in Leadership & Ethics, an academic compass that navigates a path for leading ethically in a global context. We're expanding our website to offer resources of links and research that benefits scholarship and civic engagement. We're continuously carving out a calendar of events that give platforms to community leaders alongside KSU faculty who are actively engaged in social change beyond classroom responsibilities.

So our question turns from, *what does this distant meeting have to do with us?* to, *how do we make a difference with so much to do?* Our answer lies in supreme choices: how we respond to this moment, this opportunity, and then, hopefully, tomorrow morning, and next month, and next year, and the years beyond. Like the decision for the Supreme Court Justice affects us all, so do the decisions we make every day that affect social change. In the microcosm that is the Siegel Institute on the campus of Kennesaw State University, we choose to bring educational opportunities to those who can transform the world—and in our eyes that includes every man and every woman, their children, and their children's children.