

SPEAKER 1: I've been active in NOW since 1968. I joined in Chicago when I would live there for five years, between college and coming back to South Dakota to take this job. And at that time, there were just a handful of chapters, one in Los Angeles, one in Chicago, one in New York, Washington DC, and a couple of other places.

We were admittedly founded on the East Coast by Betty Friedan and other people. But 126 of the original 300 charter members were from Wisconsin, where they had a very active Commission on the Status of Women and many women involved in pre-feminist movement kinds of things, in other words, pre-NOW feminist activities.

We have, in South Dakota, some 10 chapters. And throughout the United States, in every state, we have 700 chapters total. And there isn't a state in which we don't have a chapter. Our membership is heavier on the coasts, East and West Coast. But there certainly is, it's spread widely across the country. I think the reason it appears that our emphasis is Eastern intellectual is because of the media focus out there and the fact that many of our early national leaders were from the East Coast. And our current president is from Syracuse, New York.

So that the national media attention has been focused on East Coast leaders. But the first chair of NOW's board was from Wisconsin. Our presidents have been from California, Pennsylvania, Syracuse, Vernon, Connecticut, and various other places. So that I think it's a media image rather than an accurate description of the organization.

My perspective in terms of external issues and goals is really no different than the organization's basic direction. I have certain priorities that I would emphasize if I were elected president. I think the economic issues are the most crucial to women right now, with the economy in the state it is, with women being the first fired since they're the last hired, with the number of women heading households and the poverty conditions that women live in.

And those kinds of issues, I think, need to be given greater attention in the next couple of years. So I have certain issues that are of greatest concern to me that I would, of course, be more involved in than perhaps some of the other candidates who are more concerned about some other things.

But as far as all of us, in terms of our goals ultimately, it is to eliminate sexism and to create a humanist world where everybody has the right and the opportunity to use their full talents and abilities, regardless of their sex, or their race, or their religion, or whatever. And that doesn't change from candidate to candidate. The media focus is what I think has made the difference in terms of where people stand in now, rather than there being any real difference.

SPEAKER 2: Well, what is the composition of NOW like in South Dakota, a largely rural state? I should think your chapters would be different in many ways from the chapters in the more urban parts of the country.

SPEAKER 1: Certainly. I would say the greatest distinction between chapters is between the large urban central city chapters and small rural town chapters. Basically, there is perhaps a difference of style more than a difference of goals. Since I've been a member of both the Chicago chapter, which is a large central city urban chapter, 500 members, and a member of Pierre, Central South Dakota NOW, which has 30 members in a very small town. And we're all working on the same kinds of issues.

But in Chicago, when I was there, it was quite common to have rallies, demonstrations, pickets. We got a lot of media attention. We had a more direct action focus. It was the style of the community more than anything and the tolerance level for rather divergent tactics-- in other words, in Chicago, a picket is nothing unusual, happens all the time. In Pierre, a picket is considered revolutionary.

SPEAKER 2: There's been one demonstration at the Capitol, by AIM, as I recall, in Pierre's entire history.

SPEAKER 1: And the one demonstration that we had here on the women's movement wasn't a demonstration at all. We had a commemoration of August 26 on the Capitol steps. And there were excerpts out of suffrage speeches from 100 years ago read. The governor sent his staff assistant. It was all very dignified and everything. And I think more, it's a difference in what kinds of strategies will work in the various communities.

Different kind of strategies, different kind of image is necessary in a town like here, as compared to a town like Chicago, where if you had excerpts from suffrage speeches on the steps of the post office in Chicago, no one would pay the least bit of attention. Out here, they will.

So I think rather than being different issues that we're working on-- because in Chicago they're working on equal employment opportunity, child care, rape, and so forth. Out here, we just got, in the last session of the legislature, the best rape law in the country passed. It was originally drafted, the amendments to our rape law were originally drafted by NOW members in Pierre. And the NOW chapters throughout the state lobbied very hard for those changes.

And so when we hear it said that South Dakota is a provincial, conservative, whatever, backward state, it's simply not true because we have achieved, we got the ERA ratified here in 1973 with practically no trouble at all. Whereas in some of the more so-called liberal progressive states, they're still struggling to get it ratified. And I would say in terms of where our heads are, we are not so different. We may even be ahead of some of the more progressive in people's minds. But our tactics are somewhat different because different things work.

SPEAKER 2: Well, there have always been, it seems to me, there's always been a progressive streak among the farmers in this country. And I wonder if that affects politics in South Dakota and has made your work a little easier in some respects.

SPEAKER 1: I certainly think that's part of it. And I also think-- I thought a lot about it because in my work in the movement and in the Civil Rights movement too, people often say, how do you stand living out there in that backward, conservative state? And I say, now, wait a minute, you don't know anything about South Dakota.

And I've thought to myself several times, what is it that makes South Dakota such a paradox? And many states around us are the same way, that people think we are reactionary even and not willing to make changes. And yet we do have some of the most progressive stands on things.

And I think part of it is our pioneer heritage. People who established this state and who were its first citizens and most who set the tone of what was going to happen in South Dakota were extremely independent, hardworking, stubborn even, people, hardy stock, who came out here and endured incredible hardship. If you've ever read any of the stories of the early pioneer women, it's amazing what they went through. And they are not the sort of people to be dictated to as to what they're going to think.

If anything, women in this state share a greater role in decision making. And the Indian culture itself is extremely equalitarian, the Sioux culture particularly. And all of that, I think, has played a part in making people not labeled in their thinking and willing to be open minded.

And if you look at, for instance, the composition of our legislature, we have more women serving in our legislature here than they do in some of the so-called progressive states. We've had women constitutional officers for years. Whereas in places like California, they finally got their first last election. And it was this major breakthrough. And I said, what's so new about that? We have three women constitutional officers in South Dakota.

And so I think we perhaps tend to hide our light under a bushel. It's irritating to me for everyone else to get the credit for these major breakthroughs that South Dakota discovered years back. But we're not, we're not eager to jump into the national limelight. I think maybe people are afraid here if everybody finds out how good it is in South Dakota, that we'll have an influx of people. And the good things are here. So we tend not to advertise widely what benefits we have.

We have one of the best human rights laws in the United States. It's more comprehensive. Sex is included in every section of the law, which is not true in most states. And so you look at the combination of those things and you see that South Dakota is really years ahead in a lot of issues. But we are thought to be years behind.

SPEAKER 2: If you should become president, will you leave South Dakota?

SPEAKER 1: Oh, no. I'll work right out of my home. I already have an office set up in my dining room. The president of NOW traditionally is president from wherever she lives. Our national office is in Chicago. And I would, of course, need to spend a good deal of time there from time to time. But I would live right here in Pierre and work out of my home.