

Marianne Schnall: Thank you so much senator for speaking with us.

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand: You're welcome.

MS: In anticipation of the 2016 presidential campaign, Political Parity and Feminist.com are partnering on a multimedia campaign to continue an important conversation that I began with my book, *What Will it Take to Make a Woman President?* And when I interviewed you for the book, you provided unique insight. And we are thrilled to be able to continue the discussion with you today.

KG: It was a great book. [laughter]

MS: Thank you so much.

KG: I have it on my bedside table.

MS: Thank you so much. You have written and talked a lot about the sexism that you have faced as a woman in Washington. Do you think that sexism will distract from the substantive issues in the 2016 race, given that we have three women running for President?

KG: I don't think it necessarily distracts from the issues that are debated. But I think the absence of women in Congress, the absence of women in boardrooms, the absence of women at decision-making tables has a huge impact. And I've always said that, if we had 51 percent of women in Congress, we wouldn't be debating whether women should have access to birth control. We wouldn't be debating contraception. We wouldn't be debating abortion.

Women's reproductive health would be something that is understood. It is a foregone conclusion. Women need reproductive health, and they need access to it. And so I find that it's truly the absence of a diverse range of women who are serving in public life at the heads of these companies, that results in not all the right issues being debated, and not all the right solutions being offered. And the nature of the debate is very different than it would be otherwise.

So I think, you know, when you're talking about sexism generally, it's ever-present in all spheres of life. It's not just politics or just corporate America, it's got a lot of impacts everywhere. But if we can encourage more women to be heard, to be advocates for the issues they care about, or run for office, or aspire to run companies, you will change the climate, and you will change the culture over time, far more effectively.

MS: And politics is often described as gridlocked. Can you tell us about the bipartisan efforts that you and your female colleagues have demonstrated in the Senate? And do you think that electing a woman President would extend the same collaborative approach across Washington?

KG: I would think so. You know, more often than not, women are quite collaborative in nature. More often than not, they not only listen well to each other, but they reach for common ground. They actually want to get things done. And they can leave their egos at the door. They can leave their political parties at the door and really move forward on real substantive ideas. I've seen that in my time in the Senate over the last six years. I've seen women from both sides of the aisle come together, work together, to get things done, because it's more important to them to actually accomplish something than score political points.

So every bill I've ever passed, I've had strong republican women helping me. When I was trying to bring up the 9/11 health bill, Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe made a huge effort to help me figure out how to pay for it in a way they knew their colleagues could support. When I've done the STOCK Act, which banned insider trading, Susan Collins was right alongside. Same with Don't Ask Don't Tell repeal. Susan and others made a huge push. Lisa Murkowski has been an incredible ally in so many issues.

So I feel that republican women, along with democratic women, together will try very hard to get things done, more so than necessarily our male colleagues on any given day.

MS: We hear so much about all the dysfunction in Washington. But what are the positives and rewards of a career in elected office?

KG: Well, Washington is certainly broken, but the one area of exception, in my opinion, is among the women. We have these quarterly dinners. We get together as people first, as wives and mothers and sisters and daughters. And we talk about our shared interests, our shared values, things that we want to achieve for our children. And it's—it's a really special place, because the partisan politics really have no place there.

And so those women in the Senate and, I think, in other places as well, really do find the common ground and make Washington work in a very different way. So I really believe the presence of women at decision-

making tables is overwhelmingly impactful and can make the difference between reaching the right result and reaching the wrong result.

MS: And on the flipside, what are some of the challenges of a career in elected office?

KG: Well, it's public service. So you are serving the public for the greater good. It sometimes means you'll have less anonymity. You might have a different life than you would have otherwise if you were in the private sector. But overwhelmingly, it is so rewarding. If you know you're spending your life to help people, your job 24/7 is to make a difference in people's lives, it's so exciting. And it's so rewarding. And I would encourage every woman watching this program that if they have any interests on any issue, that they should strive to serve on some level. Try to engage in public service.

It's the only job I've ever had that I really feel like I can help people make a difference every day. And that's a huge gift. And it's a wonderful opportunity. So I would encourage any young woman who is interested in starting out in public service or interning in a Senate office, that it's totally worth their time, because they'll find not only how rewarding it is to help others, but they'll find that their voice really is unique, that they have issues and passions that are not shared. And that, if they raise the things they care about, others will join them. And they can actually move a mountain.

MS: And looking back, what piece of advice would have served you best at the beginning of your political career?

KG: To not be afraid. I was very intimidated about public service and about running for office, certainly throughout my 20s and early 30s. And so I got involved. I started working on other people's campaigns. I helped Hillary get elected to the Senate. I helped her husband in his Presidential runs. I helped a lot of local candidates run for State Senate and State Assembly and City Council in New York City. And so, the more I got involved, the more I realized I really enjoyed politics, and I really wanted, personally, to do public service. I just didn't quite have the courage.

And so, over about a 10 year period, through helping others, working on campaigns, I developed enough confidence to actually run for office myself. And it took time. So, if I could do it over, I would have tried to get there a little sooner. But you know, things happen for a reason. And throughout that 10 years, I really learned a lot about organizing and

creating grassroots support for things that I cared about candidates I cared about. And that was fun.

MS: We know, from Political Parity's, Shifting Gears research, that fundraising remains a substantial barrier that face women that are running for office. In your experience, what is the biggest contributor to that obstacle? And how do we change it?

KG: Well, for a lot of women, when they're first running for office, they feel that it's arrogant or conceited that they think they should be elected to something. I certainly felt that way. And what you learn in a campaign is that resources, and money specifically, are necessary to explain to people why you're running, what you care about, what you're going to do when you get there. And it's actually not about you, it's about the causes and issues that you care about, and what problem you're going to solve, and what group of people you're going to help.

And, as soon as you tell a female candidate that that's why she's raising money, that's why she's asking people for help, for the cause or the issue that she cares deeply about, it makes it so much easier. Because if she realizes, when you're asking someone for \$100 dollars, it's not for yourself, it's that you care about school lunch programs, or you care about hunger in America, or you care about global climate change, whatever it is that drives you, that's why you're asking for the money. And, as soon as a female candidate recognizes that, she can raise unlimited amounts of money, becomes much easier.

MS: Well thank you so much, Senator, for speaking with us. And we look forward to following your continued important bipartisan work. And we so appreciate your invaluable contribution to the advancement of women's political leadership.

KG: My pleasure. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW