

In continuation of our series, I speak with businesswoman, author, and former US Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX). With over twenty years' experience serving in the Senate, Hutchison tells us about her firsthand experience seeing the climate improve for women in Washington since she first took office in 1993. In the interview, she shares her insights on how much gender will play a role in the 2016 election, whether having a woman president would help make Washington more collaborative, and the unparalleled rewards of holding public office.

Marianne Schnall: Hello there.

Kay Bailey Hutchison: Hi Marianne.

MS: How are you?

KBH: Fine, how are you?

MS: I'm great. Thank you so much, Senator, for speaking with us today. Really appreciate it. And just to give you an overview, in anticipation of the 2016 election, Political Parody and Feminist.com are partnering on this major multimedia campaign, which is to continue the important conversation that I began in my book, *What Will it Take to Make a Woman President?* And I know when I interviewed you for the book, you provided such important and timely and unique insights. And I'm so happy to be able to continue the conversation with you today.

KBH: Thank you.

MS: And just to start off, in getting your perspective, do you think the climate has improved for women in Washington since you were in office?

KBH: Oh, I think it has improved during my time in office, just a huge amount. When I first ran, a woman still had to prove that she would do what she said she would do, and that she really could be effective in a job. I think now, I guess I was the 8th woman when I was elected. And, of course, by the time I left, there were 20. So I think the numbers and the experience that we had in those 20 years that I served really made it much more equitable, because we were communicators, we were in leadership, and so we were really accepted on equal basis. And our voice was heard on an equal basis. And while that wasn't necessarily the case when I first went, by the time I left it was. And I think since I had left, in the last three years, it's gotten even better.

MS: Well that's really encouraging to hear. I know that we hear a lot about the reason why we haven't had a woman President yet has been that there aren't enough women in the pipeline. What changes do you think we could make to facilitate more opportunities in advancement for women's political leadership?

KBH: Well I think certainly, as women have come in the pipeline, the experience that we've had, which is generally different from our growing up experience, and that is that you take a lot of punches and you keep on going. And I think that as we have matured in office, we're used to being criticized and working with people that we disagree with and continuing to be able to do well and become effective, even when times get tough. And so I think that is the case.

But to your question, I think it's helping women in the campaign level, particularly a first campaign, because that's when there's always a surprise in what you have to do and be to succeed in a political way. So I think this is a function of the party leadership plus the national and state political parties, but also the leadership in the parties in the House and Senate. I think that when the recruiting and the help opportunities arise, that's when you look for the best candidate and often it's a woman who is the best candidate. And I have found, in the last few cycles on the republican side, that our committees are favoring qualified women as the candidates to support.

MS: We of course have three women running for President. We have Hillary Clinton and Carly Fiorina and also Jill Stein, who is running again as an independent, who I spoke to also as part of this series. How would you expect gender dynamics and sexism to affect the 2016 election with three women running for President?

KBH: Well, I believe that people are going to be judged on the issues. I think that's the case. I'm not positive, but I'm three-fourths positive that the issues are going to be the major play this time. And if there are candidates that are mismatched in other ways, whether it is manner or personality or outside issues other than the sensitive issues, then that could make a difference. But I think that mostly, it's going to be decided not on gender. I think that sometimes gender will be a factor for some voters. But I think the majority of voters are going to be looking at what you're going to do in foreign policy, in domestic policy, in making sure that our country is going in the right direction in job creation, quality of jobs, and support for the middle income as well as lower income people who need help.

And I think—I think that the candidates are going to be very different in the approach on that because the parties are different. And so I think mostly it is going to be based on what the campaigns say.

MS: And regardless of how you feel about a candidate, what do you think it would mean for our politics and our country and our culture to have a woman President?

KBH: Well I think, of course, we want to show that we are open and that gender is not a handicap. I do think that it will depend on how well the Presidency is, because I think there will be a lot of watching to see—if it is a woman President—if and how she can handle the job. And I think that will also bode well for the future if she is successful.

MS: And then, in terms of the state of politics right now—politics is often described as gridlocked. What was your approach to fostering bipartisan efforts when you were in the Senate?

KBH: Oh, I very much had Democratic partners. And I always had the principles that I ran on. And I'm a republican because I do believe in the republican principles of smaller government, lower taxes, support for business and regulatory environments that fosters business. And I ran on that platform and was true to it. But I also believed that once the elections were over, you had to make headway on what your philosophy is. And in any legislative body, you're not going to get your way 100 percent of the time. And you have to recognize that America is different, and therefore sends different Senators and Congressmen with different views from yours, with whom you have to work.

The majority does rule, in the Constitution and in our country, that's what democracy is. And so the majority should be able to produce more, but accommodate and give rights to the minority. And so that was my philosophy. And I worked with Democrats every time I could and was successful in major legislation and major opportunities when I had Democratic co-sponsors.

MS: And we often hear that women tend to be consensus-builders. Do you think that electing more women or a woman President would help extend a collaborative approach across Washington?

KBH: I think women are definitely consensus-builders. I honestly don't know Jill, but I know Carly and Hillary. And I think both of them have worked with people with whom they disagree, and they have been very successful. And I think that they have the traits of consensus-building.

And I think there are men candidates who do as well. Certainly many of the Republican men that I know do. And I think that it's a trait that women have grown up with and are really comfortable with, because we're used to trying to get things done.

MS: And we also were talking earlier about encouraging more young women and women in general to run. And all we hear about is all of the dysfunction in Washington. But from your perspective, what are some of the positives and rewards of a career in elected office?

KBH: I think the positives are that when you are in public office, you generally have the opportunity to do macro things, because you are making laws and that could be, I guess, in the state or in the city or certainly in the federal level. You're making laws that are going to make positive things happen in a big way. And it's going to have a big impact.

And with all the hardships of public office, the main reward is to accomplish things that are going to make a big difference. And it is a reward that is unlike anything that you can really feel the same about in the private sector. The private sector is great. I love it. I love the variety of what I do. But the changes that I have been able to make for stay-at-home spouses to have equal retirement opportunities as those who work outside the home – that makes me feel good every day.

Then I know I've made a big difference for our country and the safety of our families. So it's that that drives people who are in public service. And you don't make as much money as people who are in the private sector, but you have a sense of accomplishment that is really unmatched. .

MS: Well thank you so much for your time today. We really appreciate you sharing your perspective with us. And continued best wishes to you and the work that you do.

KBH: Well thank you. I hope you'll send this, whatever you can, that you're writing, because I'm very interested.

MS: Absolutely, will do. Thank you again.

KBH: Okay, thank you Marianne. Bye-bye.

END OF INTERVIEW