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Learning from a leader

LEE HERMISTON • IOWA CITY PRESS-CITIZEN • JUNE 5, 2009

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Participants in a women's leadership class got a few pointers Thursday night from a woman who knows a thing or two about being a leader.

Bonnie Campbell, Iowa's first and only woman Attorney General and current member of the Iowa state Board of Regents, was keynote speaker for the Iowa National Education for Women Leadership program's reception.

Kelly Thornburg, the Iowa N.E.W. Leadership program coordinator, said the purpose of the reception was to give the participants of the six-day program a chance to meet the community and practice the networking and fundraising skills they've developed this week.

"It's also to raise awareness about the goal of creating women who are pursuing public leadership roles," Thornburg said.

The program kicked off on Sunday and features 26 female participants, about half of which are University of Iowa students. The other half are from various education institutions.

UI was the 17th university to join the N.E.W. Leadership network. The program was established in 1991 through the Center for American Women and Politics in the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University. As Iowa's first female attorney general and member of the Board of Regents, Thornburg said Campbell was "an incredible example of a public leader."

Along with recounting her career, from her early life on a dairy farm in upstate New York to becoming the Iowa Attorney General in 1990, running for governor in 1994 and working for the Clinton Administration, Campbell also offered some words of advice for the women in attendance.

"Look to role models who are what you want to be," Campbell said. "Be who you really are."

Campbell told the women that they are the next generation of women leaders and she will be waiting to see what levels of success they achieve, whether it be the first female governor in Iowa or first female president of the United States.

"It isn't as easy for a woman," she said. "But one day, the barriers will come down and it might as well be you."

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