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May 17, 2010

FMF President Smeal Receives Honorary Doctorate, Delivers Rutgers Commencement Speech

Feminist Majority Foundation President Eleanor Smeal was awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, and delivered the commencement address on Sunday. Other honorary doctorate recipients were author Judy Blume, Doctor of Letters; New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, Doctor of Laws; chemist Dr. Carl Djerassi, Doctor of Science; Reverend M. William Howard Jr., Doctor of Humane Letters; and Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Doctor of Laws. Dr. Djerassi is known as the first scientist to synthesize oral contraceptives and President Sirleaf is the first and only woman head of state in Africa.

In her speech, Smeal recognized and thanked Rutgers' Institute of Women's Leadership and its eight centers, including the Department of Women's and Gender Studies, the Center for American Women and Politics, and the Center for Women's Global Leadership.

The speech's theme was "Change the World-We Need It." In the speech, Smeal said, "Change does not always take millions of people or millions of dollars...as Margaret Mead said, 'a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.' Of course, in time our numbers grew. We went into mass organizing. We started with small rallies and marches and learned how to do massive events. But in every case, no matter how big or small - it started with a small, determined group who decided to take action."

Smeal also told the Class of 2010, "so in case you...think you have missed the Glory Days of the great movements to end discrimination--forget it. The struggle continues. We need you to finish the job." She continued, "I know these problems may seem overwhelming. But, as Anne Frank exclaimed, 'How wonderful it is that no one need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.' In my fight for human rights I have learned it only takes an idea, action, a small group of dedicated people, a whole lot of determination and work to launch a major program. The people will come; the money will follow. Action begets action. What we don't need is cynical inaction. But it also takes knowledge and research. And it takes you."

Media Resources: Rutgers University; Eleanor Smeal Commencement Speech 5/16/10



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