

President's Message – March 2017

Members of the University community,

In a 1982 interview, Britain's first female prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, stated that "the battle for women's rights [had] been largely won."

Ms. Thatcher can be excused today if we deem her statement to have missed the mark – after all we are afforded the luxury of hindsight. Still, even the "Iron Lady" would have been impressed by the Jan. 21, 2017 Women's March on Washington, when more than 5 million women worldwide, including one million in Washington, D.C., took to the streets to advocate for human rights and gender equality.

It was the largest single-day demonstration in United States history and many of our own countrywomen participated in the event. The march was, in no small part, a response to an enigmatic political vision that some believe is currently taking the United States backwards. It was also a figurative magnifying glass focused on the still-distressing fact that women lag behind men when it comes to equity in the workplace.

Here are some stark Canadian statistics: women employed full-time in Canada earn 72 cents for every dollar earned by their male counterparts; women hold only 8.5 per cent of the highest-paid positions in Canada's top 100 companies; and women are represented on less than 21 per cent of board seats at Canadian Stock Index companies.

I can tell you that these indicators do not surprise me. I see this kind of representation myself every time I meet with my presidential colleagues from across the country. In fact, throughout Canada, approximately a fifth of university presidents are women, a proportion that has not changed substantially in many years.

So while Ms. Thatcher may have thought the battle had been largely won, the sad truth is there is much distance to cover before we genuinely have anything close to gender equality in the workplace or elsewhere.

So let's all remember that March 8 is International Women's Day – a worldwide celebration that aims to bring women's rights to the forefront around the globe. I'm pleased to say that at the University of Regina, we are once again doing our part this year to make the day memorable and meaningful.

On March 8, we are hosting the eighth annual Inspiring Leadership Forum. Entitled "The Strength Within," this is our largest forum yet and will be attended by more than 600 participants.

The forum provides an opportunity for established and aspiring leaders from our province and beyond to come together for a day of networking and professional development. Some of the highlights of each forum are the keynote presentations by three inspiring woman leaders from around the world who have distinguished themselves in a wide variety of fields. This year is no

exception. Joining us at the 2017 event are three women with powerful stories to tell: Liz Murray, Zahra Al-Harazi and Monica Lewinsky.

Here is a brief look at this year's keynote speakers:

Liz Murray was born to cocaine-addicted parents in New York and was without a home by the time she was 15 years old. Despite the hardships of camping out in New York City parks and subway stations every night, Murray finished high school in just two years and was awarded a full scholarship to Harvard University. Her life story was made into a movie entitled *Homeless to Harvard*, which was nominated for three Emmy Awards. Ms. Murray is the recipient of the White House Project's "Role Model Award" and Oprah Winfrey's first-ever "Chutzpah Award."

Zahra Al-Harazi has endured hardships that most Canadians could hardly imagine. After surviving two civil wars, she came to Canada from Yemen as a young mother with three children. Eventually, she found her way back to school and earned a degree in visual communication from the Alberta College of Art and Design. Today, she is the CEO and creative director of her own Calgary-based marketing and communications firm, Foundry Communications. She has been named one of Canada's 100 most powerful women by the Women's Executive Network, Canadian Woman Entrepreneur of the Year by *Chatelaine* magazine, and one of Calgary's Top 40 Under 40.

After more than ten years out of the spotlight, Monica Lewinsky authored an essay entitled "Shame and Survival" for *Vanity Fair*. The acclaimed piece was nominated for a National Magazine Award and Ms. Lewinsky says it gave her back her voice and gave purpose to her past. Having reluctantly gained the attention of the world as a 24-year-old White House intern, today she speaks from a poignant perspective as the first person to have had her reputation completely destroyed online.

It will truly be an honour to be in the presence of these inspiring women as well as everyone else who will attend this year's forum. I know that if all of us, regardless of gender, work together in a spirit of cooperation and fairness, ours will become a better world and those words that Margaret Thatcher uttered some 35 years ago will no longer require the scrutiny they receive today.

Sincerely,

Vianne Timmons
President and Vice-Chancellor