

WALDORF, MD -Congressman Steny H. Hoyer (D-MD) hosted women business owners and community leaders from across Maryland's Fifth Congressional District for the Seventh Annual Women's Equality Day Networking Fair and Luncheon. Held in recognition of Women's Equality Day - observed on August 26th commemorating the 1920 passage of the ratification of the 19th

amendment giving women the right to vote - the event is intended to recognize the valuable role women play in our region and provides attendees with an opportunity to network with other women professionals.

"My experiences as a son, a husband, and a father helped me to better appreciate the enormous contributions women have made to our society, and also the unique challenges women face in the workplace," **stated Rep. Hoyer.** "The observance of Women's Equality Day on August 26th not only commemorates the passage of the 19th Amendment - which belatedly endowed women with the right to vote - but also calls attention to women's continuing efforts toward full equality."

This special guest speaker at today's event is Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Kathleen Sebelius. Secretary Sebelius governs the principal agency for protecting the health of all Americans by providing effective health and human services. Prior to being chosen to head HHS, Secretary Sebelius served as the Governor of Kansas, as well as the state's Insurance Commissioner. Secretary Sebelius has over 20 years of experience in state government, and has been a leader on health care issues for over a decade.

"Secretary Sebelius believes deeply in women's equality, and has devoted much of her life's work to achieving it as a leader on health care," **said Rep. Hoyer in introducing Secretary Sebelius.** "I am so pleased that she could join us today, and look forward to hearing from her just how far health care reform can go toward making that equality a reality."

"I'm honored to address the Women's Equality Day Luncheon with Rep. Hoyer," **said Secretary Sebelius.**

"Today, we celebrate the suffragists who fought so hard for the right to vote more than a century ago. And as we remember what it took to win the right to vote for women, we prepare to take on the tough challenges we must confront today. The health care status quo does not work for women, and our Administration is committed to health insurance reform that helps ensure women and all Americans have the health care choices they need and deserve."

In his remarks, Rep. Hoyer spoke of the *Faces of Women in Need* - the theme of this year's luncheon,

"Specifically, we are here to talk about what we owe to women in need-here and abroad. In America, we owe them an end to discrimination in the workplace. We owe them an education equal to their ambitions and talents, and a safe place to raise their children. But right now, in the summer of 2009, the single greatest thing we owe them is reform of our broken health care system."

"That system takes its toll on every American, in rising costs, vanishing coverage, persistent insecurity, and crippled small businesses," **continued Hoyer.** "But I don't think it should surprise any of us that the toll on women is especially severe-And that our health care system is one of the most powerful factors putting women in need and keeping them there."

Hoyer noted that less women have access to employer passed coverage -48% compared to 57% of men- and that women often pay higher premiums, especially when an inability to get coverage at work forces them onto the individual insurance market. In a recent study, more than half of women said that they put off the medical care they needed because it was too expensive-or that they went without it altogether, while only 39% of men said the same.

"Less access, higher costs, worse health-our health care system is failing America's women, and it is our job to fix it," **Hoyer said.** "And this issue deserves our special attention on this day dedicated to the struggles of women in need."

Hoyer also addressed the need to extend a hand of assistance to women in the developing world and praised the Obama Administration for making such action a key focus of development policy, "As passionately as we fight for equality here in America, we cannot forget that the urgency of women's equality knows no borders....Quite simply, it is to put women and girls-their education, their health, their chance to become economically self-sufficient-at the center of our development policy. I'm pleased that President Obama and Secretary Clinton have already done a great deal to bring our foreign policy this new focus."

Hoyer concluded, "The most vital resource of this new century is not locked in the ground; it can be found in the minds, the dreams, and the ambition of the world's women. The work of equality may change from decade to decade or from nation to nation, but the ideal

remains the same in every place and time: that the future belongs to our daughters every bit as much as to our sons."

Elected officials in attendance at the Women's Luncheon were Delegates Sue Kullen and Sally Jameson, and Charles County Commissioners Edith Patterson and Barbara Stinnett.

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